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ARIADNE

IN NAXOS

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ARIADNE IN NAXOS.

Ballantyne Press
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ARIADNE IN NAXOS

BY

R. S. ROSS

Ἀλλὰ τί κεν ῥέξαιμι; θεὸς διὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ,
Πρόσβα Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἄτη, ἣ πάντας ἀᾶται,
Οὐλομένη, τῆς μέν θ' ἁπαλοὶ ποδες· οὐ γὰρ ἐπ' οὔδει
Πίλναται ἀλλ' ἄρα ἧγε κατ' ἀνδρῶν κράατα βαίνει,
Βλάπτουσ' ἀνθρώπους.—*Homer.*

Ἀλλ' ὅυτι ταὐτη τόνδ' ἔρωτα χρή πεσεῖν.—*Euripides.*

λαμπρὸς δ' ὅοικεν ἠλίου πρὸς ἀντολὰς
πνέων ἐσήξειν, ὥστε εὐμάτος δίκην
κλύζειν πρὸς αὐγὰς τοῦδε πήματος πολὺ
μεῖζον.—*Æschylus.*

—— οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ἀνοιγμένας πύλας
Ἅδου, φάος τε λοίσθιον βλέπων τόδε.—*Euripides.*

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1882
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280. j. 848.

ARGUMENT.

THESEUS, son of Ægeus king of Athens, having undertaken many perilous expeditions and performed many valorous feats, in emulation of Hercules, had gone to Crete to rid the Athenians of the yearly tribute of seven youths and seven maidens to the Minotaur which had been imposed upon them by Minos, after his invasion of Attica, to avenge the death of his son Androgeus, whom the Athenians had slain. After vanquishing the Minotaur by means of the magic sword and clue with which Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, supplied him, he departs with her for Athens, but being driven into Naxos by stress of weather he determines to leave her there. Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus, is entreated by Dionysos to be his wife, but she is deaf to his supplications, and in her despair determines to kill herself. She is, however, forestalled in this by Artemis, who slays her with an arrow while out hunting; and Dionysos places a crown of stars in the heavens in memory of her.

Theseus married Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, and after her death, Ariadne's younger sister, Phædra.

The scene is in Naxos.

ARIADNE IN NAXOS.

ARTEMIS.

HITHER, from blue Arcadian hills where roam
The fleet-foot antlered game I love to chase,
Hither, from mountain crags and glens and wilds,
I come, intent to visit Delos where
The Titan's daughter, led by highest hand,
Gave the chaotic world the Source of Light—
Phœbus Apollo—me with him as twin;
There Hera-hunted Leto's temple towers,
My rites in fitting shrine are celebrate,

And the superbest fane e'er reared by man
(E'en to Apollo's worship) dedicate
Of yore by Cecrop's son, increasing aye
In fine proportions, beauties, wonders, wealth,
Still stands pre-eminent (e'en as its God
In loveliness and loving works to man,
Benighted e'er his advent) o'er all shrines,
And there still reigns in his most holy place
The God of universal excellence;
And there his healing horn-knit altar stands,
And there his worship lastingly endures
E'en as the Zeus-forged adamantine chains
Which link this sacred soil (once floating isle
For Leto's sake made fast) immovably
To rocky depths of never-resting ocean.

Fair Delos then my goal; but my desire

My brother's proudest altars to behold

Once more, also the isle whence he extends

O'er all on earth that is, that lives, that moves,

His beneficial, well-accorded sway,

Has for a space been tempered by the thought

That urged me further from my course to this,

The eager thought to find and contemplate

A scarce-wrought rock-cut work in Naxian marble,

A mountain statue of the mighty god

Who doth inspire to works of nobleness.

Ardent within me is the longing, else

I ne'er had stayed my golden-hornèd stags,

Nor from my chariot in this isle set foot,

For here the rites are those my soul abhors;

The Syrian scents and luscious clustering grapes,

The slimy serpents, spotted panthers sleek,

The riotous sounding cymbals, frenzied dance,

And shrieks of fauns, and dames intoxicate

With mirth, fill me with loathing for the soil.

Lo ! here the Goat-Limbed waits his worshippers

In glare of noontide sun, and vines distilled

To madness-rousing essences foam o'er

The curling lips of wreathèd chalices.

When silvery night leans over the loved brows

Of heavenly silence on the sleeping hills,

Reverberate here the sky-aspiring crags

And forests with the furious unsouled mirth

Of sense-intoxicated Mænades.

I would that none lured by malignant fates,

Or wrecked by evil fortune, e'er should set
Their foot upon this Naxian soil, lest they
Be caught by soft allurements to repose,
And, drenched with fragrance and the drowsy cup,
Be blandished by the youthful God to wed
Them to his service, sullying thus the germ
Of pure Olympian fire Apollo sets
Within each mortal bosom. Let me haste
From this unpleasing atmosphere to air
Made pure and holy by the marble form,
As yet imperfect, where Apollo deigns
Permit the mystery of his deity
Be dimly shadowed forth by mortal hand
By him inspired and guided, to delight
The adoring eyes of heavenward-yearning man.

CHORUS.

STRO. 1.

Whose are the tones of silver?

Whose are the steps of snow?

Whose is the dazzling quiver?

And the brilliant supple bow?

ANTIS. 1.

Whose are the gleaming tresses

O'er the shining shoulder down flung,

Hair the horned crescent caresses

And radiance of stars glints among?

STRO. 2.

Why cometh she hither to witness

The sights the stern Huntress abhors,

Where blemish may fall on her whiteness

Unsullied by shadows or flaws?

ANTIS. 2.

Why hasteth she now towards Coronis,

The tomb of the faithless she slew?

Shall the nymphs who once mourned for Adonis

Their wailings in Naxos renew?

STRO. 3.

Blue of the erst flawless heaven,

Shall storm turn your azure to black?

Wind-guarding caves, are ye riven

To thunder forth ruin and wrack?

THESEUS, ARIADNE.

THESEUS.

Regret no more that we were driven aside
From our intended course and primal aim
By winds unfavouring, as it seemed; for here
Where we (too thankless for vouchsafèd refuge
Unsought of us) set foot, bloom wooingly
The vivid tinctured flowers you love to cull;
Here rarest plants spring from the rich soft earth,
And cling about your feet to welcome them,
And as it were beseech your steps to tarry,
Caressing them with many a tender touch.
See, how the tendrils climb e'en to your knees,

And, though you press them back unheedingly,

They still entwine in spite of your neglect.

ARIADNE.

It is a fragrance-laden, beauteous isle,

Nor of its luxury of loveliness

Am I unmindful, or 'twere fitter said,

'Twould more enchain my spirit, were my mind

Disposed to linger and to feast thereon

Reposefully in these sweet dells and grots.

But, Theseus, while thou speakest thus, I know

Thy thoughts are ever turned towards Ægeus' land,

And eager for its shores thou know'st no rest,

Or only dost inflict unwished repose

On striving senses; for the winds and waves

And feeble oars will not with wingèd speed

Transport your yearning feet to Attic soil.

THESEUS.

I would be there, I fain would see the folk,

The senators and venerable king,

Would see them decked in welcoming state attire,

The lustre-yielding crown and purple robe

Gracing the hoary head and honoured form

Of ancient Ægeus; then the grave, stoled priests,

And people in fine holiday attire,

Following with mirthful steps their sovereign chief,

To greet with loud acclaims the long-desired

Returning son victorious. Yes, I see

Them issuing forth in stately file at first,

Then rushing, leaping, unrestrained, with shouts
To hail me once again deliverer.

ARIADNE.

I see them too, meseems I see them too.
The wingèd thought o'erleaps the severing space,
And from its ardent source brings forth the form
Of all that pageant, living, panoplied,
Complete, as e'en of yore from crownèd head
Of cloud-girt Zeus his blue-eyed warrior daughter,
Endued with wisdom, and with well-wrought arms
Accoutred at all points for horrid war;
E'en so complete the vision which thy words
Prick on my thoughts to yield my willing eyes,

And never clearer shall I see't than now.

Would we were there! what stays us from our goal?

THESEUS.

Content thee, Ariadne; 'tis the storm.

ARIADNE.

I see—and see not, it is not the storm.

Some powers of evil lurk about us here.

THESEUS.

This isle's too fair for powers of ill t' inhabit,

Though evil fortune casts us on these shores.

ARIADNE.

'Tis here, yet 'tis not here. I see not clearly—
Assuredly I know ill is not far.

THESEUS.

The chill and gloom of eve weigh hard on thee,
And storm and toils of ocean-beating waves
Upon the well-oared ships have wearied thee,
And sorrow for the tedious delays
And adverse winds that beat us from our course
Has filled thy heart with cares, and in thy mind
Thou thus conceivest dark imaginings.
Still, if it frets thee, think (to relieve thy pain)
More it frets me thus to be holden back
From all those works I hastened onwards to,

For work has been to me as breath of life;

My life has been consumed in difficult deeds.

ARIADNE.

Ah! tell me yet once more of all your feats;

I love to hear those glorious deeds re-told,

And never tire of hearkening. Oh, I know

Your thought, but to fill out the enforcèd rest

I'll lie athwart your feet, and list the tale

Of fearlessly achievèd marvellous works;

Reluctantly I force me to forget

The prowess graven on my memory,

That I may say begin and tell it all

With every circumstance from first to last,

Sparing no pains to instruct my ignorance.

The gifts thy father Ægeus left as tokens
To know thee by, when thou to manhood grown
Shouldst claim thine own in Attica, home-going
From Trœzen where fair Æthra gave thee birth,
And where her sire, King Pittheus, nourished thee
Through tender years of youth—these gifts, the sword
And sandals, bear I ever in my mind.
For even as with these thou wentest forth
At first in thy career to win thy way,
So, near the summit of thy hardy climbing.
My sword and clue within thine hands found strength
To scale the ruggedest opposing crags;
That sword won for thee ancient Ægeus' throne,
For by it he knew thee and declared thee heir;

The sandals bore thee o'er the painful ways;
So through distressful mazes led my clue,
Lightening the toil, and with my sword thou won'st
The crowning jewel of a nation's life—
Its liberty. This gem within thine hand
Thou now again seek'st Attica's blue shores.
There drawing from its sheath this conquering blade,
Thou'lt flash it in the sight of king and people
As token of their priceless liberty.

THESEUS.

As token too that Ægeus' son still wields
And sways the destinies of Attica,
Again will Ægeus know and will proclaim
With pride my deeds to Athens' citizens.

ARIADNE.

Here sit and tell once more th' excelling deeds
That, winning from Athenian hearts (as e'en
From Cretan and from wide-world breast and voice)
Honour and homage, steeped thee in renown.
As from the weighted clouds the gracious burst
Of fruit-power-laden waters falls with strength,
So the world-gathered torrent of applause,
Sinking with fertile might in ready soil—
Thy eager, thirsting breast—absorbèd, brought
New wealth of lofty thoughts and marvellous deeds.
One work achieved, achievement brought no end,
But praise attained was still the fruitful power
Producing some new marvel of perfect work,

And some as yet unstoried miracle;

Recount the yet unfriended of my ears,

For to the sum of all I heard of old

Are there not more of moment still to add?

And even to those noble deeds I know

Belongs much circumstance of interest

Which fleeting hours, or culminating zeal

Of close narration, granted not to appear.

Now, while to thy swift soul the feet of Time

Seem heavily to lag and limp along,

Beguile th' enforcèd sojourn here with thoughts

Of that enforcing, uncurbed restlessness

Which bore thee on to deeds, and brought forth fruit

Of matchless grace and benefit to man.

Perhaps, while speaking of thy fortune's chance,
From out the past may come some flash of light
To clear the lowering present, or to point
Some speedier or more prosperous outcoming
Than that which looms so dimly o'er us now;
Yet dimmer, so it seemeth to mine eyes,
For me than thee, although it frets thee more.
Look on those clouds, they're denser on this side,
And now while plays the flash about thy head,
The blackening sky looms ominous o'er mine;
And list yon swooping bird, each time he shrieks
More fiercely whirling to this darker side,
And here the mist hangs heaviest. I look out,
And still I see, as I have seen of yore,
The future writ, but veiled. Still I can read.

THESEUS.

Scan not the present gloom, read not this hour,
Nor fret thyself with threatening signs. For me,
Shall not my will subdue as in the past?

ARIADNE.

I've looked for this and thought to read it so:
'Twas so awhile, and then that seeming fled.
But with more powerful vows in Attica,
I will entreat the Gods for clearer sight.

THESEUS.

'Twas doubtful what thou saw'st? Not like the past?

ARIADNE.

But I shall drain again for thine enhancement
My prescience, and my old victorious spells

Weave out anew, not now, not here—and yet

This hour seems filled with omens. Shall I speak?

THESEUS.

I listen, speak. Say what thou see'st to-night.

ARIADNE.

The clouds weigh heavily down, and clash, and close,—

A conflict—not of arms—nay, in the mind

A strife of darksome thoughts, the issue known

And certain, irreversible, yet strange.

What follows then? 'Tis veiled, and yet methinks

A prosperous sailing first—some trouble too,

Now here, now there, fair winds, a flying craft,

A sail—surely a sable sail or dark;

Then loud lamenting, for the sea hath ope'd,
And in her jaws received a precious gift;
Off from the cliff sped down a sapphired form,
Purpled and crowned. I know not what this means.
Dost hearken? No, thy thoughts are all entranced
As mine, but otherwhere. Not so, thou say'st?
What shall I further speak? for now methinks
My power doth slack; yet burns the steady flame
The Gods themselves have kindled in my breast,
And here, far from our Cretan fanes, I still
Within myself a sanctuary bear,
Where I will fan the embers of the fire
Prophetic t' illume the scroll of Time,
And read for thy behoof; and by this same
Will whet the tempered steel to finest edge,

Again to cut the knots which envious Fate

Weaves to ensnare thy danger-seeking feet.

THESEUS.

E'en as this blade has severed all it smote—

Without it I had failed and lacked the crown

Of all my former feats—for this last deed,

The slaying of the horrid Minotaur,

O'ertops them all. Though I Hephæstus' son,

Cercyon, overthrew, who slew those guests

That, wrestling with him, fell, and his own daughter;

And Sciron, ruffian robber, who compelled

His victims spoiled to cleanse his trait'rous feet

On the Scironian crag, and kicked them heuce

Into the yawning sea, where turtles fed

Upon their bodies; Procrustes next far-famed
Who stole the traveller's gold, and tied the wretch
Upon an iron couch, which stretched his limbs,
When short, till they fulfilled its longer measure,
Or their length more, severed their dangling feet;
These vanquishèd, I Crommyon rid of Phæa;
Th' usurping Pallantidæ I o'ercame,
Restoring thus to Athens' throne my Sire,
The rightful monarch, and the chosen king;
What though I slew the devastating pest,
The hornèd bull of Marathonian coasts,
And fell Medea's cup and fateful snares
Avoided; though to Hades' realms I won
My way to bring pale Queen Persephone
To earth again—aiding Pirithous then

In this who once had aided me, but now,

While braving Hades, perished miserably;

What are these deeds when placed beside the one

Which Athens frees from galling human tribute?

ARIADNE.

I shudder when thou nam'st the dreadful fee;

How oft for these, all hopeless of relief,

(Ere thou, redeeming hero, to us cam'st,)

My curdling blood, congealed with fearful pang

And pity for the fair young victims thrown

To glut the monster's loathful appetite,

Did freeze the voice within me and the cry

For some strong arm and brave deliverer

To snatch the dungeoned innocence and beauty

From the revolting clutches of the man

Bull-headed. Athens' citizens and State

In palsied conclave help-ungiving sat;

Despairing parents forth did lead their best,

Their cherishèd, their offspring softly bred

With year-renewèd anguish, their most brave

Young sons who, living, had been Athens' shields,

And quivering pallid maidens, a death-freight

Of precious tribute to the sable ship,

While yet no sword sprang out from side-bound sheath,

No saving voice, no holy cry resounded:

I will deliver! no cry till thine. Thou, Theseus

(Impelled by godlike pity for the helpless,

Renouncing, travel-worn, the hearth's warm joys,

Toil-stained, forgetful of the anointing balm,

And purples, and thy couch's soft repose),

Sprang'st forth as if to greet new kindling joys,

And, fronting the huge evil undismayed,

Didst grasp and grapple with it in deadly hug.

Mailed was the dreadless heart with fire-forged steel

Of patriot longing for the common good,

Nerved was the sinewy arm with swerveless will,

And dauntless resolution or to free,

Or fall within the fetters, whose cold links

No fire melts off from the firm-holden prey,

Desired of Hades for his chill grey realms.

THESEUS.

Something of this, but thought went not so far,

Nor winged my mind desires as high as these,

Yet dost thou shadow something of my soul:

For truly utmost masterdom, or loss

Irreparable, waited such emprize—

Irreparable loss, no middle mean

And poor, covets the insatiate soul whose shafts

Know aims no lower than those planned of gods;

And what high thing that mortal man doth prize,—

If high, and he be high t' appraise its worth,—

Will crown the brows if he nor strain for it,

Nor clutch it with an eager iron grip

When, striving near at length, his longing grasp

May fetter it with unrelenting hold?

If he not know, nor see, nor care to toil

And spend his mortal breath and beauty of life

To attain all grace that Gods and men esteem,

To his indifferent self-high-valued soul

Will come the most desirèd grace? will't pray

Him take this fortune and this heaped content,

While nor his patient feet and reined-in hand

Spring forth to arrest the wingèd dream, nor stirs

His unaspiring soul? I did desire

Great praise of men and gods, nor burnt desire

With ineffectual flame. I strove and won.

ARIADNE.

Theseus, it needed not, let not thy speech

Outrun the memory of thine ancient deeds.

E'er this last feat the praise of Gods and men

Was thine, nor needed greater measure of praise

Of men nor favour of all Gods, for thou

Before hadst won o'erflowing chalices

Of favour, and all praise from Gods and men.

Not fame alone, but duteous pity moved thee.

THESEUS.

Thou look'st too high, but part may'st fairly see;

High aiming marked the way, but sore the work

Needed achievement and none rose to save;

The Cretan yoke pressed hard on Athens' neck

For slain Androgeus, Minos' son, thy brother.

ARIADNE.

Unerring, unremitting, sleepless Fate!

Bitter the blow! Androgeus, my loved brother!

Oh, he was fleet and fair as is the dawn,

And godlike in all prizèd feats; great fame

His conquering skill in Athens won for him—
Great fame, and death, an envious, cruel death
Calling for peremptory retribution;
But direful was the vengeance which engulfed
The Athenian flower of youth for his dear sake.

THESEUS.

Yet had he not sailed forth in quest of fame,
Had he not died, perchance I ne'er had set
My eager foot on Minos' tribute-craving soil,
Nor won the crowning fame of all my fame.

ARIADNE.

True, no excelling day had brought to Crete
Athenian Theseus in the swift-oared ships.
Still, to my view, like some empyrean-clasped

Heaven-climbing peak, out-dazzling its white fellows,
Stands out that shining day, unveiled of mists,
Rising above all other heights, beyond
All other luminous days, peerless, alone.
Phædra and I, young sister Phædra, sitting
In our high tower, a little off the court,
Were tracing silken tales of varied scenes;
Weaving, she sang of silvery Artemis,
The cruel huntress queen, but I stretched forth
My trembling fingers to her rosy lips
And bade her stop, nor turn the golden day
To shivering night. The shuttle then flew swift
Along the woof awhile I spun my tale.
Apollo was my theme, and down the heavens
The Sun-god urged his coursers to the marge,

Then seemed to stay them, flashing to my prayer
Soft flames of ardent variegated light
And luminous-coloured rays athwart the place
Where I with stretched-forth hands sounded his praise.
Into my heart and breast and o'er my lips,
Fulfilling my desire, his power he poured,
And gazing through the hazy moted hour
I looked, and saw the coming, and the ways,
And good and ill, and how to assert and hold;
Nor did my pæan cease its upward note,
But ever while I saw and knew, I praised,
And fastened all within my mind and voice;
Transfixed I saw, I felt, I knew, I sang.
The beautiful, the bright-tressed, sunny Phædra

Stood near, much loved and loving; the gold tone
And rich accordant hues drew o'er her cheek
A changing flush; and when the web was wove,
She, casting back her sun-smit tresses, sprang
To me and cried: You spin a magic thread
Of power to pierce the innermost recess
Of hidden mystic life, you stir the pulse
From imperceptible calm to lofty spires
Of palpitating, wild, victorious thought,—
And yet I know not what you say and sing.
While still she spake, I, leaning 'gainst the bar
Which opened towards the court, looked down and saw
As 'twere Apollo's self, but bound and led
By twain side-guarding soldiers towards the cells

Prepared for those most miserable prisoners

Destined to glut the man-devouring beast.

Jarringly on the spring-tide music fell

The clanking of thy chains, as, led away

From lower depths to lowest, thou didst pass.

The shadow of thy state fell on us twain

Where leaning forth we gazed, and gazing wept;

The glory and the shining of the eve

Faded to sullen gray, and from the sea

A slight but darkening cloud approached, and threw

A chilly veil around us both, meseemed.

She shivered up to me, I stroked her brow

And hands and clasped her tight, and knew I not

In full, nor clearly, why one chilling shaft

Should strike both hearts, and one cold cloud enveil

Her fate and mine, yet separate, in one.

Oh, murmured sister Phædra in her grief,

Is there no cunning may deliver him

From out the horrid maze? Contrive, contrive!

She thrilling clasped and drove me to the door.

I knew—for all was fastened in my mind;

Straight down the spiral stair I fled to one,

An ancient servitor, who oft had borne

Me on his brawny shoulders in his prime

While I a child. Now him beseechingly

(For lightning-swift my brain had spun the thread

To save thee from the monster's deathful jaws):

'Who is the prince in iron bondage 'twixt

The stalwart guards?' 'Theseus, the prince of Athens.'

Then, when with Phædra's aid the glueing wax,
With many hidden charms and midnight spells
And ancient magic songs of powerful bent,
Was kneaded with the tangling tow to balls
To be by thee, upon the beast's assault,
Thrown in the yawning chasm of his jaws,
I wove the guiding clue with many a tone,
And ground the mighty blade to severing keenness
With Hadean incantations, offering too
Upon the sacred altar in the temple
The finest peplus of our handiwork
And other gifts propitious. This achieved,
Our hoary warder led us to thy cell.
From manacled dejection up thou sprang'st
To greet the light the creaking hinge announced.

THESEUS.

The light of hope and swift deliverance.
Promptly thy palpitating words explained
The dazzling visitation and intent;
The guards, beguiled with wine and many a gift,
Obstructed not my passing forth to seek
Within thy tower the enchanted implements;
And there until the fateful hour drew nigh
I dwelt securely and in great content.

ARIADNE.

In great content, but ah, too fleet the moons!
And swift the fierce fate-laden day drew on
That summoned thee to battle with the beast.
Relate again thy struggle and his death.

THESEUS.

Armed with thy supple magic-tempered sword,
Thy silken clue, and balls of wax and tow,
I passed between the warders, near the den
Whence first thou rescued'st me; hard by in cells
Lay my six Attic comrades, nigh to them
The seven fair maidens who should glut the rage
Of the devouring monster unappeased,
Unsatiate at my death with his repast,
Should I fall in the fray; their cries and prayers,
Their lamentable moanings, pierced and whetted
My lingering spirit yearning still to thee,
And tying to a wall-embedded nail
Thy silken thread, which in my hand unwound
As eagerly I sped on through the close

Thick-folded alleys, I my gloomy way

Pursued, by one sole-guiding thought possessed.

Dense silence as of Hades compassed me;

So long the winding way, I 'gan to think,

Perchance no Minotaur was here encaged,

That Minos' son was but a fabled monster,

The human tribute victims to fierce famine,

When on my ears a yell, unlike all yells

(So human and unhuman was the sound)

Had e'er assailed my sense, smote thunderingly,

And roused my blood to know my foe at last

So near. With answering shouts bounding I leaped

To feast his eyes and mine on destined prey.

Sudden the windings ceased, and lo, he lay

Right in the spacious midst, crouching to spring.

As in the agora when the wrestler waits,

With bended limbs, lowered neck and up-turned head,

The rushing onslaught of his athlete foe;

So rested, balancing his hideous form

On one firm-planted forward foot, this huge

Man-monster, backward thrown the other limb

And hand with open palm and fingers bent

To grip accordant with the forward claws

The appearing prey. Fierce 'neath his hornèd brow

The eyes glared flamingly. Soon as he saw

Me there, his mouth yawned chasm-like,

And on he sprang with an unearthly roar.

Into his gaping jaws I quickly flung

Thy tow-mixed wax, and while his glueing teeth

Strove with the tangling stuff, I slashed thy sword

Across his outstretched arms. The crimson tide
Poured from the gaping gashes, maddening him,
And stirring all my blood to savage strife—
But why again affright thee with the tale?
Enough, thou knowest the end; content thee so.

ARIADNE.

Ah, well the throbbing moments I recall!
Silent the night when, looking towards the bay
Where the brave bark which soon should bear us hence
Was moored, I heard the faithful warder's voice,
And knew thy desperate enterprise afoot;
And in that self-same night knew thee victorious,
Victorious and safe for evermore—
Oh what a joyful morn upon the waves!

THESEUS.

But willingly thou went'st not forth, and fair
Young Phædra would'st have borne away with thee
But for my counsel she were with us now;
I think I wronged thee there, she should have shared
Thy faring. Hast no wish to see her, say—
'Tis not so far to Crete in favouring gales,
Though long has been our way with adverse storms.

ARIADNE.

What would'st thou, say. Would'st not retrace our way?
Approach to Creta's shores were death for thee
And me. Phædra I ne'er may see again.

THESEUS.

Breathe not so mournfully. Return I meant not,
But if't should be our lot here to abide
A space, 'twere not impossible to send
Some trusty slave with greeting to your sister,
And means of transport to this fragrant isle.

ARIADNE.

Shall we abide so long? and art thou fain
To have her with us? 'Twere a smiling hour
That brought young Phædra to us lingering here.

THESEUS.

Reflect on it, if lonesome moments e'er
Betide thee, or oppressive clouds pack up
Betwixt thee and the happier hours to come.

ARIADNE.

What clouds can shadow while the light burns bright
Beneath the steadfast brows in eyes that turn
To light as steadfast, whatsoe'er the way
The wandering footsteps tread in sun or storm?

THESEUS.

Yet see clouds thicken angrily about;
We'll seek some pleasant place of rest, till gloom
And storm abate. Let's haste to seek repose,
We will not rashly quit this Naxian shelter.
See here Nyctileus' honoured altar's decked,
And well 'tis we were driven upon these shores,
For fertile is the hospitable land
And full of sweet allurements, yet may these

Not hold me idling here. Sore was the way,
And tedious the delays of angry waves,
Us driving from our homeward course to this;
And now, after long days of toil and wrack,
(The end for which 'mid cares and fears I sailed
Attained, conquered the tribute-craving beast,
Defied its guardian, Europa's son—
The fierce and ancient foe of Pallas' city—),
I yearn me back to Ægeus, who in doubt
And grave suspense awaits my tardy coming.
Anxious my mind, for restless are our foes;
The Amazonian queen Hippolyta
Threatens the sacred soil of Attica;
The bordering fields are desolate, for like
A cloud of swift sharp-stinging gnats

These women-warriors afflict the folk.

I would release the land from this scourge also;

Ægeus, to lay the strife and still to hold

In full subjection these fierce women-foes,

Desired me wed their warrior-queen, and place

Her by my side on Athens' royal throne.

What says my Naxian-bound enchantress-queen?

ARIADNE.

Desired you wed Hippolyta? O Theseus,

Darkly will lower his brows on me from Crete!

THESEUS.

Nay, darken not the clouds, which soon may clear,

With darker thoughts and forecast sad and chill

Of coming gloom, nor peer with moistened eye

Into the distant ill which ne'er may gather.

I meant to win the incredulous smile of thee.

ARIADNE.

Will he not happily reflect and say:

No less a scourge than are these women-foes

Was that of Crete, the vanquished Minotaur?

Will he not ponder in this wise awhile?

No more, like scarce fledged birds by cruel claws

Torn from the nourishing nest, shall Athens' children

Be dragged to feed the pitiless human pest?

THESEUS.

Full apt is man to think what ill betides

Had ne'er o'erflooded him, had he but wrought

Some deed undone, undreamt of while the low

Still tide marred not the flowery banks and meads,

Where now the ill is ended by some means

Unpleasing to him, or irksome to be borne.

ARIADNE.

Will he not grant, the fierce dishonouring fee

With no remission still were wrung from out

The throbbing breast of Athens' purest life?

THESEUS.

The thwarted will is often fain to glance

Back from the cankering evil of the past

Which smarts no more to that which chafing frets—

From memory of past pain allayed to this.

ARIADNE.

Thou hast not seen her? is she fair as fierce?

THESEUS.

Nay, question not, but choose some happier theme.

ARIADNE.

But is her bearing warlike as her mind?

Or hath she gentle eyes? hath she been wed?

THESEUS.

She is not wed, her warrior-women love

Their virgin Queen. Before their ranks she rides

A wild and supple form. Oft it fell out,

Whilst flying spears glanced woundingly, her eyes

Flashing their steely fires smote full on mine,

As, clinging lithe as agile spotted pard

To her fleet, foaming steed, she past me gleamed.

ARIADNE.

I see her in the cloud that veils thy fate.

THESEUS.

Be not disquieted, bring back thy thoughts;

The storm abates, propitious calm returns,

Thy slumbers will be soft and deep to-night.

ARIADNE.

No thought of her, but only strong desire

To rid thy country of its foes now moves thee?

THESEUS.

No thought but that of Athens and of Ægeus;

These stinging Amazons must be subdued,

And speedily, for Attic's fertile soil

Is trampled down to arid barrenness
By unremitting, ravaging warrior hoof;
E'en Ægeus' royal towers are scarce beyond
The spoiling sweep of their audacious aims.
But cease our argument of gain and loss,
Rather receive the profit and repose
Which court thee in these soft embracing glades,
While I see placed within some sheltering cove
Our strainèd ship, till clouds sail far from hence.

CHOROS.

STRO. I.

Ay, slowly and lingeringly walk by his side,
O helpful enchantress, O strange Cretan bride,
For heavy the air is with change and with sorrow,

The unwilling feet shrink from the unveiling morrow,
And curses may fall on the dawning which bore
Great Ægides, a stranger, to Creta's fair shore,
Though he left it victorious with thee,
For thou gav'st him a sword and a clue,
By thee Dædalus' labyrinth he knew,
By thy magic was Athens set free.

ANTIS. I.

In the oft-folded den where he gropingly strayed
Thou shon'st in the darkness, nor wast thou afraid
Of the peril, the wrath of the father forsaken,
Of remorse which the sundering of bonds must awaken;
On the fame-forging-steel, on the future his eyes,
Thine on Athens and his; then were rent all the ties

That bound thee to Minos and Crete.

O Helios, arrest thee to-day,

For Pasiphaë's child thy course stay,

Thy joy-giving hours are too fleet.

THESEUS.

Uninjured at her moorings lies my ship,

And when these close-drawn clouds unweave their mesh

I should embark. Yet are there shifting sands

Where sinks the foot, and slippery rocks where grates

The wave-left keel, while strive the anxious hands

To float the tardy craft, before the tide,

Receding quite, leaves her up high and far

From destined sailing at the hoped-for hour.

Such rocks, such sands do we of our own will

Oft run upon, well-nigh to our undoing.

Will Ægeus hail the home-returning son

Who leads a hated Cretan to his halls?

Or place paternal hands on head of one

Whose sire imposed a galling tribute yoke

On free Athenian necks, sore to be borne?

And rid of this, will our Athenians bow

Before a Cretan reigning as a Queen

On Attic soil—in Athens' royal halls?

Will Minos' child, Minos, our long time foe,

The sister of Androgeus, envy-slain,

For whom our choicest flowers were yearly culled,

And cast before the fierce bull-headed man,—

The terrible offspring of this Cretan's mother,

Queen Pasiphaë,—think, will this stranger bride,
This daughter of the tyrant who exacted
The virgin tribute for his cagèd beast,
Be welcomed as a throne-mate for the heir?
I see the folk's ill-smothered wrath burst out,
I see, too, calm derisive smiles, and hear
Their swift smart speaking. Ægeus' long-nursed thought,
To end this war and bring a daughter home
By union with the Amazonian queen,
(That so, before Aidoneus claims his prey,
And darkness veils his venerable sight,
His eyes may see great Athens firmly fixed
In planted peace and glad prosperity)
Would be confounded, if I homeward led

A daughter of the royal Cretan house.

Here lie the rocks o'er which my ship must float

To farther homeward waters, or by which

Lingering she'll lose the tide of fortune's wave

And find on these strange shores her end of sailing;

Yet how to cut the moorings dexterously,

And leave unwarned the lonely wanderer here

Upon this island desolate and far

From Crete? Will not her prescient power pierce down

The close-enwoven threads of tangled Time

And snatch and pierce the flaws to my undoing?

Mystic and strange her arts; I see as 'twere

A fate-ordainèd priestess in her mien;

Her eyes are fed with fires of ancient light,

The cycled past linked with the veiled to-come.

Such light it was, mysterious, in the den

Lit up the shrouded labyrinthian ways,

And such Olympian kindled flame it is

Which seemeth now to weld the present hour

And circumstance with time and deeds to come,

Thus piecingly to weave inseparably

The strains of life we clutch, and those the hands

Impatient strive to sever, tearing them

From off the distaff's 'portioned, measured mass.

Yet who consentingly will live and breathe

To be the tool of Fate, by which she spinning sits

Treading her will out, for behoof of whom?

Behoof of States, and swelling increment

Of the great world hive. 'Mongst the gross, dull drones,

Or swarming workers (plodding, toiling on
Unquestioning, unreflecting for whose weal,
Whose profit, this day-labour unremitting),
Who will be reckoned? or unreckoned? or
(Nearer the exacter truth) unrecked of, sit,
Or swarm, or drone, or work away the span
Of life's allotted year-count? Who will thus?
Why all the herd, or willing it or not,
All save the few who, willing, greater toil
Confront, and grapple with the dangerous stress
Of fierce antagonistic elements,
Not easily allayed, (though easily roused,)
Nor quickly quelled; all, save the rarer few,
Grind the same mill, content or discontent;
Why be the wheel, the loom, the thread, the distaff

When strong to hold, to tread, to weave, to cut?

Why under foot be trodden, when of power

To trample on the foe and cast away

The arbiters, reject their arbitration;

And in their high usurped controlling seat

Each God-filled man, ruling his fate, may reign

King of himself, and for himself devise

(And for the swayed of him) such web as he

Has skill, and will, and might to execute?

Thus have I ever wrought, and though with strain

Severe have e'er o'ermastered force opposing,

And intricate and mazy schemes fulfilled,

Scaling towered rocks and rugged pinnacles,

Or groping through gray Hadean fastnesses

Or labyrinthian underneath-world dens,

Seeing but one end ever, clinging to't

And shaking sheer away all weights soe'er

(That cling as drowning men do use to cling,

Cling to their own perdition and the ruin

Of those who fain had snatched them from the jaws

Of yawning woe and placed them on the shore

Of safe repose), I've sped to strenuous deeds,

Yet unachievèd onward beckoning me.

One is the drowner here, we swam awhile

In stormy seas, and now stern Fate decrees

Division of our onward course, one sinks,

Or both, if one holds desperate on, apart

One swimmer crests the swelling forward wave

To clasp again the flowing purple hem

Of rock-enthronèd Fame's enswathing mantle

And rises to her side victorious.

Unconscious sleeper! may all fair content

And this and all the fragrant dreams which now

Possess thee stay with thee; ne'er know thou less

Of comfort, but aye greater, if perchance

Thy dreams now owe thee aught of perfect joy;

May yet undreamed-of bliss be thine for aye.

To thee, Great Goddess, I return again

Unrivalled mistress of my earliest youth

And days continuous thence to present hour;

Since I elected thee, and thou, O Fame,

Didst give thyself to my most eager will

And striving of unquenchable desire,

No thought nor wish has fallen away from thee,

Nor weaker grown with weight of added years;

Flawless my faith, no lesser deity

Has ever held me thrall to her fair sway—

Lesser in my esteem, though others bow,

And own supremacy of deities

Who throne and rule, and wide allegiance boast

Of multitudes within this busy world-hive,

Claiming and holding cream of much fair life,

The rarest syrup of the downiest flowers,

And finest honey of the well-filled comb.

I ne'er have swerved from thy steep ways, O Fame,

Nor stayed to taste the offered wine cup wreathed

With tangling tendrils, nor the o'erflowing comb,

Save in such measure as the traveller needs

For strength's renewing way-side entertainment,

Receipt of hospitable offerings,

Acceptance of such bounty as demands

Acceptance for its payment in just fee ;

Yet never has a shadow fall'n between

Thy glory and mine ever-steadfast eyes ;

Not unobscurely hast thou shone, nor wilt

Thou now, though clouds veil up the sky,

Obscure thy shining Godhead, nor remove

Far from me while I struggle in the toils

Spread ever for the wand'rer's passing feet.

The cloudy network somewhat of its force

And close cohesion slackens, clears away

(While pales the sun of the eventful hours)

The might of untimed heavy hindrance,

The coast is free for rapid sailing hence

And lasts some light to point the homeward course.

CHOROS.

STRO. 1.

O Ægides, great and glorious
Are thy Herculean feats !
Thou unceasingly hast striven
For the fame such prowess greets ;
With thy Periphetian club
And mighty arm thou hast o'erthrown
Many a monster, many a plague ;
Even great Alcides' own
Olympian strength derived of gods
(Encased in mail Hephæstus-forged,
Armed with weapons, gifts divine)

The groaning earth of plagues scarce purged
More potently, more conqueringly,
O Ægeus' progeny ! than thou ;
Ay, even the Pallantidæ famed,
And all opponents to thee bow.

ANTIS. 1.

Ay, we will sing (as sings the world)
Of all thy rare achievements' grace ;
For when the fifty thou laid'st low,
Thy agèd father to his place
On Athens' throne thou didst restore
Where Pallas' sons aspired to reign ;
Then when the devastating bull
Of Marathon thou'dst caught and slain,

To Creta's shores thou sailed'st to free
Thy country from the cruel yoke
Europa's son imposed, the Gods
In thy great cause thou did'st invoke;
They stirred the heart and filled the breast
Of Minos' child with holy fire,
Thus fresh laurelled fame didst thou,
God-led, God-lighted, there acquire.

STRO. 2.

Great the fame a mortal man
May win who strongly sets his soul
And all his being's strength to one
Fixed aim, as needle to the pole,
Which no seductive Syrian airs,

Nor shifting storms may ever win

From that determined point his eyes

Unflinchingly embrace ; no din,

No mirthful revelry, no song

Of siren e'er his ear attains,

Deaf to all utterances save one,

The one his swerveless aim sustains,

Ay, such an one will win of men great praise,

His name will live and shine,

Indelibly engraven

Upon the glittering scroll of time.

ANTIS. 2.

But oh, fierce striver for applause,

Striver for trumpet-tongued fame,

Dost hear no higher, finer voice,

Dost feel no finer, higher claim

By various-sided nature pressed?

Does hope of fame, the people's shrill

Applausive cry, their clam'rous: Hail!

Thy being satisfy and fill?

Or does't but gratify self-love

Increasing ever as it feeds,

Which, craving still, destroys the germs

Of holier thoughts, of higher needs

And generous impulses which spurred

In youth to high attainment, not

For fame, but that the soul must soar

Heavenward, world's praise and blame forgot?

STRO. 3.

World's praise, world's blame unrecked of,
Self unsought, the eyes of youth upturned
To clearer atmosphere whence truth
And faith drawn down may be inurned
In fane of his untainted heart,
In holiest fane therein to light
One flame undeviating, love
Of fellow man and love of right.
What though a mortal ne'er attain
To mortal-builded pinnacle,
But silently by kindly deeds
Men's noblest feelings manacle,
He shall, as sorrowing Psyche erst,

Striving by virtuality

Of God-imposèd tasks achieved

With love win immortality.

ANTIS. 3.

Erst, ere the unwingèd soul fell sheer

From joys Olympian, God-forlorn,

She, for the unallaying draught

Of frail-tongued praise, thirsting, had drawn

Into her veins the poison sweet

Which prompted untrod heights to assail,

To penetrate the undivined,

To tear away the sheltering veil,

She raised the lamp, the curtaining night

Was rent with gross disclosing glare;

The Godhead fled and left the soul
Shivering amid the mortal blare
Of loud-voiced commendation; this
Alone remained henceforth to sate
The yearning soul fulfilling tasks
Fixed by inexorable fate.

EPODE.

Ah, e'en while thou speakest I tremble with fear
'Neath the desolate chill of the clouds lowering near,
The folds of their heavy drenched raiment fall round,
There the bolt falls to earth, and Zeus' thunders re-
sound!
Ah! whose are the forms I perceive in the glare
Where lurid the light as of torches' fierce flare?

Whose the scorpion thongs and the heads wreathed
with snakes?
The eyes whence flash fiercely these fiery flakes?
See, sulphurous-visaged and swarth they arise
From Tartarus' flames; the white sea, the gray skies
Are hidden, and blackened to denseness of night—
Let us haste to escape from this horrible sight.

TISIPHONE, ALECTO, MEGÆRA.

TISIPHONE.

Sister, where are these web-enmeshèd ones?

ALECTO.

One wanders here about, the deed not done,
The intent within his heart but newly sprung.

MEGÆRA.

'Tis rooted, swiftly has the weed upgrown,

When once 'tis in the seething caldron thrown,

Of fierce up-bubbling action 'twill exhale

With dire effect the fumes of mortal bale.

TISIPHONE.

Whence sprang the deadly seed? in his own breast?

ALECTO.

Ay, there it roots and blooms, a flourishing guest.

MEGÆRA.

What nourishes the fast up-springing weed?

ALECTO.

Man's vain self-seeking, fierce and fiery greed

Of mortal praise for marvellous exploits;

Let this repay; there's that too which requites.

TISIPHONE.

His other hatching project shall bring forth

An instrument for Aphroditè's wrath.

Prepare, avenging sisters, whips and scourge.

ALECTO.

But first the wind to bear him o'er the surge,

And fill his sails and him with triumphing,

Till he forget the bleachèd tarpauling

Old Ægeus waits for on the jutting cliff.

The agèd eyes discern the dusky skiff

Lacking the sign ; the monarch hurtles down

Into the foaming billows, life and crown

With fatal swoop renouncing. Sister, speak !

MEGÆRA.

Bring forth, bring forth another of this brood !

ALECTO.

See, other callow, crookèd beaks emerge !

MEGÆRA.

Shall these with strengthening claw his mind assail ?

ALECTO.

Deeper and deadlier far the final grip.

MEGÆRA AND TISIPHONE.

Disclose, disclose ! sister, disclose ! disclose !

ALECTO.

When youth and strength are past, all fame achieved,
When fierce ambition's fires are laid to rest,
And love of strife and toil has found an end,
When regal round and purple him enfold,
And beautiful and brave the huntress' son
(For Theseus will espouse the Amazon)
White-souled devotes his manhood to the Gods;
When the pale, pain-fed Phædra, Athens' queen,
Sits silently and hides her deadly woe,
At Aphroditè's call we will again
Uprise from lowest hell, and in the heart
Of Theseus' wife implant those scorpion pangs
Which breed unslakèd thirst for dire revenge;
Hippolyta's young son shall scorn the queen,

And for her hidden love of him (revealed
By treachery) upon his father's wife
Shall pour indignity, and threats to blast
Her on her throne; then will we hasten up
And pour the poison in her riven breast,
And there engender such a knotted broil
As shall entwine and strangle to their deaths
King Theseus' wife, this Ariadne's sister,
And Theseus' son, white-souled Hippolytus.

MEGÆRA.

Oh, deadly wise! Oh, direful brooding brain!
Nostril-assailing vapours thick from hell
Steam up to warm these fledglings newly hatched.

TISIPHONE.

Gather these fumes about us, and descend,

Gather them in, nor leave a trace behind,

Gather as skirts the steaming stench of hell,

Gather the fruitful odours and descend.

ARIADNE.

Where has he wandered? or is't I have strayed?

Obscuring clouds are 'twixt us, thick and swift

They've gathered in while I in slumbers lay.

I know not where to seek, I fain would call

But fear to break the silent gloom which reigns

Around—a gloom as if infernal Gods

Here wandered. Gray, as dense and limitless

As Hades' chill dread void. And yet this isle

To laughter-loving Bromios decks itself,

And when I here set foot but now 'twas gay

With song and breeze and scents of flower and shrub.

How soft the moss and warm unto my feet,

Now't seems but stiff and chill and colourless;

Hushed is all sound, deeper than night this hush—

A hush as 'twere precedent of some storm,

And ominous of some thunderbolt of ill;

A cold heart-sickness creeps through all my veins,

Untunes me, blurs mine eyes and every sense,

And discords nature's harmonies that were.

This outer change is but the evil note

Of change (within my fate) which stirs in me,

And as it curdles all the past, doth run

Shivering adown the rapids of my life,

And on the stream-torn rock I stand all bare
Of warmth and life, and gaze into the flood
Which once did bear me gaily on my way,
But leaves me now unsheltered in the void
Of Time on-coming. In the sunny past
Not one slight point but sparkled o'er with rays
Of varied, ever-changing, radiant light;
'Twas like a rainbow-threaded zephyrous space,
A bright gem-studded earth where toil was joy,
And violet-curtained night a light sublime,
Wherein the peace-draped body lulled in waves
Of starry ether, floated to the dawn.
How bright the awakening, when the opal gates,
Beneath the touch of fingers rosy-tipped,
Rolled back to let the saffron-kirtled queen—

Hyperion's daughter—guide her eager steeds
And golden chariot from the Ocean's stream
Through the bright barrier up to flowery earth
And breezy-scented heights melodious;
Now this awaking is not of the dawn,
Nor musical, nor soft, nor filled with life,
But gray and stagnant as of nether night;
Yet will I press this darkness from mine eyes,
And rise above these clouds, if I may pierce
To some keen point, some distant gem of light—
No ray above, nor forward, nor around!
Below my eager feet some beauty yet,
And fragrance lingers, sweet though drooped and chilled;
Would this night pass and but the morrow rise,

Certain I should be joyful as of yore.

Now one approaches—welcome sound of life.

THESEUS.

Thou art aroused? comes on the night apace?

ARIADNE.

Would it were morn, or noon, or e'en bright eve!

I fain would stay the chariot of the sun

And rein his champing steeds to lengthen day,

If anywhere about the brighter world

They linger yet unconquered of dire Doom.

THESEUS.

Surely though ardours at this hour burn low,

And of the moderated heat and light

Of slackening coursers men refreshed grow glad,
The now grave Hours with lighter step will soon
Upon the Sun-god's glowing horses place
The fine-wrought harness and the tempering reins,
And they will course the heavens as gloriously,
Ere thou hast well dreamt out thy tarrying dream,
As e'er they coursed when in thy Cretan bowers
Thou sought'st the shadowing shelter of the leaves.

ARIADNE.

I know't; but if they course until the skies
Crack with their coursing will they bring us rays
As bright, as gladdening as the rays which pierced
The tangled foliage of our Cretan grots?

THESEUS.

Nay, doubt not that they will: a passing cloud
Will not prevail against the Gods' intent.

ARIADNE.

I fear—I know not, who can measure brightness?
But this one thing I know, no hour from out
The long dim glades of time can ever come
Which shall reflect more brightness on my path
Than those which fell on the glad shores of Crete.

THESEUS.

Perchance thou err'st; shall subtle arts and sense
Instruct thee how to peer through all the glades
And narrowing avenues of enshrouded time?

ARIADNE.

Enshrouded are the coming hours, meseems,
In pale dull pall of ominous hue; my skill
Suffices not to scan, t' interpret this.
A shadow lowering sits upon some brood,
I fear, of ill; I feel the clammy claw,
Formless as yet, stretch from the vaporous nest
Out towards my inmost. Theseus, speak to me!
Some fiend looks through the murk to grip my soul

THESEUS.

'Tis but the shade of yon approaching storm.

ARIADNE.

'Tis more! 'tis more! it layeth hold on me!

It comes from out the bosom of the future,

Living, yet curdling cold. O Theseus, speak!

THESEUS.

I'll pluck this flower and place it on thy heart,

And it shall speak to thee in far-off days

Of the fair fleeting hours we've known together,

The strifeless intervals of toilful life.

ARIADNE.

May never days dawn on me if the rapture

Of those we've known fleet with the hours that were.

THESEUS.

Now pluck and give me one to take with me.

ARIADNE.

To take with thee? I'll pluck this heather bloom.

THESEUS.

We shall not always stay in Naxos' isle;

I'll guard the flower in memory of past hours.

ARIADNE.

Let not thy love with its frail blossoms fade.

THESEUS.

Do not the poets sing that love is deathless?

But long I may not linger in this isle.

ARIADNE.

Nor would I have thee rust in idleness,

Nor stay thee here from Athens long-expectant;

I would not have thy Herculean powers,
Thy pride of victory, thy thirst for honour,
Thy mightiness for work, and need of it,
Dulled, quenched, or laid aside even for a space;
I would not have thee stay thy chariot wheels,
Nor see the rivals following in thy wake
O'ertake thy fiery coursers at the goal.
Untiring would I have thee as a star
Of ceaseless splendour and of ceaseless joy,
Apart from others, unapproachable,
Unrusting and unresting in thy course.

THESEUS.

Thou firest me with new ambitious zeal.

ARIADNE.

So would I help thee to 't as in the past.

THESEUS.

I saw in thee the priestess at whose hands
Alone I might receive the mystic gifts
Wherewith to reach my latest, highest aim.

ARIADNE.

Nor only these were needful; fire I took
From off the holy altar of the God
Who doth inspire to deeds of highest worth
And kindled in thy breast the conquering flame.

THESEUS.

And gave me to achieve this highest toil,
Which shall again wring out men's clamorous praise.

ARIADNE.

Theseus, I love that men should honour thee,

But not for their acclaim I fired thy soul.

I yearn to highest heights for thy behoof;

Would I could climb the skies for sacred fire

Wherewith thou might'st burn up earth's basenesses,

Scorch out its meanness and its low desires,

Consume to ashes all its pride of custom,

Melt off the metal chains which hold the soul

Grovelling, to smirk appearance holding close

Till it diminish to the body's size,

And level of surrounding pigmy forms.

I scorn the smooth appraisement of success

Which passes by the higher worth which failed,

To lavish honours where the circumstance,

Perchance alone, of favouring time and place
Bore on the fortune-favoured to renown.
Would thou couldst climb to unattainèd heights,
And highest deeds achieve for their own worth,
And thence look down upon the puny world
Which could not hold, and could not follow thee.

THESEUS.

Would'st have me reign alone without compeer,
Without companions, over subjects, slaves?

ARIADNE.

I'd have thee reign and lead, not follow men;
I'd have thee break the cramping chains asunder
Which hold thee fettered still to slavish forms.
Ay, thou should'st break the freezing hardening bonds,

The soul-contracting trammels of convenience,
By wise men forged to tame ungainly manners,
Constraining, where no graces are, to show
Of graces; right and just I deem such bonds,
For they restrain, and by restraining oft
Raise habit up to virtue where before
No virtue was; no man need scorn such bonds,
Though lower souls but need them. But beware,
While scorning not, while valuing at their worth,
Nay, guarding, cherishing them, beware, beware,
To weld them in with virtue, reverencing
The show, the form, the outward rite and seeming,
As it were virtue's self. Let not thine eyes
Be blurred or blinded by the rain or rays
Which may to grosser, more unheedful sense

Obscure, or make to mingle obdurate weeds
And delicate flower-buds, or confound the wild,
The bitter ocean with the pearl-hued sky.

THESEUS.

Thou'dst have me rein the mass with tightened curb,
And hang the bridle loosely o'er my neck.

ARIADNE.

Not so; I'd have thee curb thyself and them
In all where curbs are useful, reining in
The restless, unobedient, hard-mouthed steed,
Thy own recalcitrant will or will of others;
But still have care to know thy faithful coursers,
Nor chafe and cut with cruel needless steel
The glorious steed that wings thee to thy goal.

THESEUS.

That goal above the clouds, whence I may look
Down on the grovelling grasshoppers of earth?

ARIADNE.

Even there and thus. I'd have thee aim above
Thy highest aim, which is too low; for see,
Thou hast achieved all thou hast ever aimed at,
And know man's aim should ever be beyond
His seeming powers to attain, or 'tis too low.
Thou hast achievèd more than other men,
Hast had the power to prove thee king of men;
So now, no longer *more* thou should'st achieve,
But *higher*. Gaze like eagle on the peak
With fixed undazzled eyes upon the sun,

Which flames from east to west to make men
live;
Yet not for their applause doth he appear
Immutably within yon boundless vault,
Whelming the purple skies in seas of gold;
Nor, sinking slow into his amber couch,
Doth he bejewel in the silent eve
The burnished clouds and radiant restless sea
For our shrill pæans; uttered we no cry
Of ecstasy when he sinks down below
The lulling wave, or when the blushing Dawn
Steps forth and draws aside the golden portals
Which veiled her lord and ours from mortal sight,
Though we were unobservant, blind, and dull,
Still would he bless the universe with light,

And ever steadfast, though we heeded not,

Would steep infinity in living beauty.

THESEUS.

Thou soarest high,—would'st wing me in thy car

To those aërial realms which only eye

Of spirit can reach, where only spirit can live?

ARIADNE.

Yea, thou should'st aim so high in thy desires,

Yea, thou should'st strive t' o'erleap those obstacles

Which earth-bound souls affright. I'd have thee see

With eyes of seer, with eyes of god-filled man,

Nor ever should'st thou walk with earth-drawn eyes,

But constant on the grandeur of the heavens

Thy eager glance to draw instruction thence.

THESEUS.

Will these exalted aims and God-like thoughts
Have power, when grief shall bear the spirit down
Even to the soil it spurns, to raise it up,
Sustain and wing it from the clay-cold bed
Whereon despair hath stretched it numb and stiff?

ARIADNE.

If light and fire and sun and moon died out,
If riving bolts smote light from life asunder
As forkèd flash the bark from off the tree,
Or branch from trunk, felling one charrèd part
Prone to the earth, why then, the gorgeous heaven
Of day, the diamond canopy of night,

The ethereal power which upwards draws all life,
Could have no power, methinks, to raise again
That blasted tree, though through one tiny strip
Of tough unsmitten rind the living sap
Flowed onward yet to feed a leafy branch.

THESEUS.

Thy dreams, thy eager thoughts, thy magic work
Would they avail thee in a blasting hour?

ARIADNE.

When the warm blood is wrung from out the heart
Who can have power to lift his eyes, his palms,
To draw inspiring breath from Gods above?
The lids droop powerless down, inert the hands,

The knees refuse their burden, and the clay
The feet once spurned is couch for clay as cold.

THESEUS.

I cannot think this fair strong body would fail,
Nor yet the flaming soul burn down less bright
Before the fixèd time, whate'er befell.
But why dwell thus on gloomy fantasies?
This flowery isle should brighter thoughts evoke;
The way from Crete was rough, thou need'st repose;
On yonder mossy bank a fair soft couch
I'll weave of asphodel and fern; there lay
Thee down, and Sleep within his gentle arms
Shall fold thee, till these storms be overpast.

CHOROS.

STRO. 1.

Oh, that I once might set my foot
On some unclambered height,
Whence mortal work might be o'erlooked,
And to my mortal sight
The whole complexèd web displayed
With springs of action all o'erlaid,
Not hidden below
The woof, or woven through meshes to and fro.

ANTIS. 1.

Oh, that upon yon heaven-lit crag
I, mounting, might see through
The thick-wove skein or tattered rag,

Knit with the mystic clue :

Oh, that to these my straining eyes

Were once disclosed the power that lies

In man t' achieve

All good, yet pricks him ill therein to weave.

STRO. 2.

Oh, that some bright reflex from her

Who bears the shield and spear

Would to this flickering web transfer

A radiance bright and clear

Of her own prescience ; thus to man

The power of insight give to scan

His mazy way,

So he no more from wisdom's paths might stray !

ANTIS. 2.

Oh, all ye Gods! say how it haps
So oft that who aspires
To mightiest deeds, his soul enwraps
In desolating fires;
They know, yet not avoid the ills,
And eager quaff the cup that kills;
They scale the peak
Where sit th' avenging Fates their ire to wreak.

STRO. 3.

But who stays not to recognise,
Or seeing deems no wrong,
Feels late, but sure, the sting that lies
In fate's avenging thong;

The past shall be redeemed with pain
And torment till the sin be slain;
Or, late to slay,
Continues to the shades the vengeance day.

ANTIS. 3.

Behold who set his life to save
Athenians from their yoke,
Who wept for those who crossed the wave,
For their sakes hailed the stroke
Which should to loathsome den urge down
The martyr or deliverer; none
Save he arose
To deal the monster life-destroying blows.

STRO. 4.

Lo! now his eye is blind to griefs
He weaves for one whose life
Is interlaced with his; the reefs
He recks not of are rife
With woe and wreck and ruinous death;
The stormy waters hide beneath
Their billows' roar
The ills borne on towards Athens' distant shore.

ANTIS. 4.

Ægides, pause! find out the way
To reconcile thy fate;
To those who seek will shine some ray
To guide them and t' abate

The rigour of the hand that becks
Them to a goal amid the wrecks
Of sundered ties
And crushing hopes and mortal agonies.

THESEUS.

What are these 'plaining sounds, these warning words?
Were ye Athenians, different were your thoughts!
Know I am bound by duty to my sire
And to my country; sire and country both
Bade me go forth to strive for Attica,
They bid me now return to fight for them,
And look to me to give them peace and rest.
Shall I rebellious turn against the state
Which nurtured me and lays on me behests

To assure her peace and future weal? Shall I
Stand arrogantly forth in face of him
Who eager mounts the cliff to welcome me,
And place before his deprecating eyes
A wife unbid, a wife unwelcome to him?
Nor he, nor Athens would admit the bride;
And worse by far were it for her to face
The scornful gaze or cold averted mien
Than live apart untouched by Athens' hate.
Far better then she in this isle remain,
For ties precedent claim our first respect;
And he who treads unwaveringly the path
Of duty to his country's laws and Gods
Must reap approval both of Gods and men.
This fragrant isle doth well approve itself

Unto her mind, and life and loveliness

Will woo her to content, as now this couch

Of soft caressing blossoms woos to sleep

The sometime storm-tossed wanderer. Nor I doubt

This isle inhabited by winning creatures

And kind, who'll tend and love her speedily,

For, lo! this decorated altar stands

Prepared and garlanded by delicate hands

To service of the laughter-giving God,

Who calls his votaries from every land

And blesses them with mirth and happiness.

Here reigns great plenty, corn and wine and mead,

And soft thick furry skins for winter's cold,

And foliaged bowers and grots where summer's sun

Can scarce peer in to wake the slumberer.

Meseems all that is needful for content

And joy is here, nor could we happily

Have found a pleasanter, more suiting spot.

Then, Ariadne, think 'tis better so.

Cretan, thy path and mine are not the same;

If we essayed in this to rule our fate,

The years would prove 'twere not for thy content.

Then rest thee there, 'tis easier so for thee

And me; and while kind sleep doth gently veil

Thine eyes and senses I'll depart, and save

Thee words which only could thy grief enhance,

And grief thus gently falling will, I doubt

It not, soon yield to kindly offices

Of friends and gay compeers who'll find thee here.

'Twere better thou should'st wake and find an end

Of all the past, and learn to teach thy heart,
Unschooled before, some newer, brighter faith
Than waking listen to the stern decree
Of fate irrevocable from these lips.
But now why stay I breathing idle words
When there she lies, oblivious of all harm,
Cradled in happy visions? Why, when there
My ship with oars in rank doth seem to rise
And dip, as beckoning me to haste and seize
The favouring gale?—why turn I back to gaze
Once more? why hesitate my feet, my mind
Being fixed immovably? Meseems my fate
Is written there, written as heretofore;
There dwells an ominous future in her face,
I cannot read the signs, but pallid lights

Gleam fitfully like dying fires across
The alabaster brow, like sundering blades
Cutting the future from the fiery past.
Are all my highest deeds achieved, perchance?
And lies my future low and near an end?
I would she slept not, would her eyes could read
For me; I am not prescient; warrior,
Not seer, am I; yet 'tis as though some cords
Invisible still held me bound. I'll on
And mock at shadows; shall my strength give way
To feeble fancies? No. Surely she moved;
She'll wake and I yet here! No; motionless
As carven ivory. What was't? that sound?
A leopard creeping through these tangled branches?

Or breath of passing Godhead? Does she breathe?
Ay, softly, not so loud nor harsh as these
Weird sounds. They grow, they near me, low and
sharp,
Now hissing as of snakes and poisonous things;
The air grows thick and heavy; I must hence
For storm is hovering round, I'm wrapped in it,
Encircled in a dense dim cloud of hell.
Yet stay! methought I heard a voice, a laugh,
Ay, mocking laughter; now, so murk the air,
I see not Ariadne. There, instead,
Rise shadowy, incomplete, and formless shapes,
Nearer, more definite in deformity,
Three huge-boned shrunken hags of hell approach;
From skinny shoulders shoot forth gratingly

The unfledged iron wings whose rattling rends
The air they beat upon; foul stench and flames
Hiss from their toothless jaws and bloodshot eyes,
Their sharp-clawed fingers writhe round scorpion thongs
Of many forkèd tongues, and fiercely grasp
The hell-lit torches belching lurid smoke.
Now all the air is thick with noisome fumes,—
Where is the road that leads unto my ship?
I'll call these fiends, and learn how I may best
Escape from hence. Who are ye? Speak to me.

TISIPHONE.

Theseus, we hail thee! hail thee, Theseus hail!

THESEUS.

If friends ye are I also give ye hail,

But say, who are ye? whence? and wherefore here?

TISIPHONE.

We are the ne'er-forgetting spirits that roam

From nethermost abysses through all space

To visit those who even in our despite,

Forgetful of us and our watchful care,

Work out their own dear wills, their cherished thoughts.

We know thee, Theseus, and we hail thee, hail!

THESEUS.

Why then I also give ye hail again,

But tell me more, as yet I know ye not.

TISIPHONE.

We are the daughters of the ancient Earth,

The Heavens our father, Night and Darkness too

Delight in us as in their own begotten;

Aidoneus' ministers are we, and rise

From Phlegethon's red banks in Tartarus' realms;

We are the deities who hold the ends

Of mortal actions in our balancing grasp;

Man works and we award, 'tis ours to knot

The due result of every human aim

On to the cord whose strains were its beginnings;

'Tis ours to bring to birth the timely fruits

That deeds engender; ours it is to fill

The cup with wine which man has toiled to press,

We are his cupbearers, and to his lips

We hold the cup he mixed, we pour not in
Of our own mixing; if he finds therein
Gall and the nightshade, he 'twas seized the weeds
With his own hand while gathering the grapes;
And if our torches light his final draught,
'Tis that no other light shines for him where
His own deciding hand cuffed out all light.
Know we are just, no harm accrues from us,
We ever bring to man his rightful own.

THESEUS.

If just ye are, and visit mortal man
But to award what he has justly won,
Impose not now the fine for that I erred
In robbing Cretan Minos of his child,

Nor place this veil of hell before my sight,

To hinder me upon my settled course.

TISIPHONE, MEGÆRA, ALECTO.

We hinder not, nor help. What would'st thou have?

THESEUS.

These fumes obscure the way, how should I hence?

How quickly hence avoiding where she sleeps?

MEGÆRA.

White-livered! does a sleeping woman fright

Thee from the way thy fixèd mind has chosen?

THESEUS.

Who says white-livered? Were ye not in hell

When I its terrors braved for Hades' queen?

ALECTO.

What lion lies across this hero's path?

THESEUS.

Though ye be deities, your words are vain;

Know, fiends or friends, no lion nor no woman,

No slight thing, nor no strong, shall fetter me,

Nor stay me once I've fixed my settled course;

But how cut straightly through these Hadean fumes?

MEGÆRA.

Thou fear'st th' awakening. Where's thy magic sword?

A keenly-tempered blade cuts clear all paths.

THESEUS.

It was my thought, but strong unflinching will

Shall easier cut the tangle of this skein.

MEGÆRA.

Ay, easier for thee now, easier for us
Hereafter, sisters, when the avenging hour
Shall call us up to execute the award
In full. There lies thy way, we will withdraw
This murky veil. 'Tis done, sisters, away!
Our work is done, a keener doom's prepared
Than death for this forsaker of her father's house,
And all the train is laid for his undoing;
In heaven and hell the web is weaving up.
Hence, hence! Hero, behold thy ship! and there
Thy Cretan sorceress, mindless of thy steps;
Unsheathe thy Minotaur-stained sword, and with't
Cut all the threads that tangle up thy path.
Sisters, shroud in your skirts, withdraw, withdraw!

THESEUS.

First name your names, ye cloud-enwrapped guests!

Ha! they have passed as storm-torn vapours pass,

And only now a mist lies low on earth.

Her sword, the cunning sword and silken clue,

Her own proud gifts, I'll not take with me hence,

I'll lay them on the turf beside her couch.

Now, Ariadne, fare thee well! farewell!

CHORUS.

STRO. I.

Infernal are the sounds I hear!

Infernal are the sights I see!

I shrink! I shrink! I fain would flee!

But fettering pity holds me here.

ANTIS. 1.

The clangour of the iron wings
Like muttering thunder distant dies,
Like ebbing tide the rolling eyes;
These twain are girt with hell-forged rings.

STRO. 2.

The deeds thrust back, the bonds remain,
Faded the flower, the fruit holds on,
And feeds ye when the sunshine's gone;
Ye strive to rend the past in vain.

ANTIS. 2.

The ebbing wave in fixèd hour
Runs back and leaves the scattered weed

Awhile from whelming sea-power freed,

Returning tides resume their power.

STRO. 3.

Beside her sleeping 'neath the tree

He lays the gifts which bore him on

To highest wave of victory won

For Athens' state and youth set free.

ANTIS. 3.

He lays them down, and to the shore

With hurrying footsteps swift he hies

Where rocks his ship 'neath clouding skies,

The ship the Cretan hither bore.

STRO. 4.

The sword was sharp to smite the woe
Which fettered Attica to shame,
Was sharp to win undying fame,
Was sharp to lay the monster low.

ANTIS. 4.

Will it be sharp to cut the cord
Which binds the Cretan fate to his?
Which binds the Cretan house to this
Of Athens? blunt for this the sword.

STRO. 5.

The magic coil which led him through
The Dædal labyrinthine ways,

Will it unite the vanished days

And pride to days and glory new?

ANTIS. 5.

The Cyclops throws his hammer down,

The chains are forged, the chains are broke;

Can burnt-out embers be awoke?

Will end with these the Erinyes' frown?

STRO. 6.

The curse has fallen now on twain;

On Cretan Pasiphaë erst,

And Creta's shores became accurst

When fair Europa crossed the main.

ANTIS. 6.

The veilèd Godhead thither bore

Agenor's daughter, and the same

Huge form he chose from ocean came,

Curse-laden to the fated shore.

STRO. 7.

Europa's son was cursed for her,

And cursed brought down, by broken vows,

The curse on progeny and spouse—

Fruit of the curse the Minotaur.

ANTIS. 7.

When linked was Attica with Crete,

When weeping human tribute sailed

To sate the Cretan monster, quailed
The burden of the sable fleet;

STRO. 8.

Then Ariadne fell within
The shadow of the lingering curse,
By her the hero must everse
Her father's beast, by her must win.

ANTIS. 8.

Thus twain of three have fallen beneath
The doom Europa's race must fill,
And other hearts with woe must thrill
Ere fate the avenging sword will sheathe.

STRO. 9.

Th' Erinyes spoke the doom decreed
O'er Dionysos' holy shrine,
The mutterings of the curse divine
Fell from their wings on Minos' seed.

ANTIS. 9.

Then on the sands the waves rolled back,
And on the shoreless sea of Time
I saw the doom of coming crime
Writ, by the Erinyes, fiercely black.

STRO. 10.

The doom's pronounced: that once again
The heaven-sent mightiness will rise

From out the storm-tossed wave 'neath skies

Where conquering Theseus soon shall reign.

ANTIS. 10.

Phædra shall trail the curse along

To Athens freed from galling yoke,

To Theseus and the vows he broke,

For sister Ariadne's wrong.

STRO. 11.

For her in Naxos cast aside,

For her sake shall he seek in vain

Th' unbroken faith he cannot gain

Of her the Cretan sister bride.

ANTIS. 11.

For her, avenging crime and shame
Shall fall upon his fated roof,
Th' Erinyes spin th' enmeshing woof,
Not peace but woe shall crown his fame.

STRO. 12.

The white-souled Amazonian son,
The splendour of Athené's home,
Shall curb his coursers where the foam
Bears gift of King Poseidon.

ANTIS. 12.

While faithless Theseus' crime-stained bride
Hangs by the column in the hall,

(By her own handwork Orcus' thrall)

His son lies gulphèd in the tide.

EPODE.

We would flee, we would flee,

From the record we see!

From th' Erinyes' pursuing would the fated ones

free,

We would free them! would free!

But as foam flakes of ocean

Torn by Notos' commotion,

Are flung from the wave toward the sky

Whence scattering swiftly they lie

Evanescent, consumed on the rock

Immovably built, which no shock

Of the unstable tide

Can displace or divide;

So mortals who rise to assail

Preordinate laws sink in bale

'Neath the fangs of the Furies who wait

To shatter and rend in the hour

When they falter within the fell power

Of Até's implacable hate.

DIONYSOS.

From banks of old Aigyptos' quickening stream,

Where teems the rich moist earth with luscious plants

And plenteous well-filled ears of swelling grain,

O'er Syria's watered plains and vine-clad hills

To distant Ind I've wandered, where the gates

Of golden day, by dainty-footed Eos—
Hyperion's peerless child—are backward flung
When Helios, rising from his jewelled couch,
Brings promise to the world of life and hope.
There tawny men from their dark creeds I've won
(And from their darker rites), though with some toil,
To plant the vine and twine its tendrils round
Their swarthy brows, to press the juicy fruit
And hold the cheering chalice to their lips.
And dance, and song, and culture have I taught,
Though oft, I fear, in vain to gloomy minds
Worshipping gloomier gods, cruel and rude.
Then Greece, old Argos, native Thebes, where most
I'm glorified, I've sojourned in;
Yet nowhere do I more delight to dwell

Than in this verdant, wave-washed Naxian isle.
Ah ! well (while looking on these swelling waves
Yet foaming, turbid, from subsiding storm)
Do I remember me the toil I had,
And sport too, with those false Tyrrhenian slaves
Who steered towards Asia's pirate shores t' enslave
And sell me, Dionysos ! Oh, I laugh
While thinking on the pains I pierced them with !
What sport to watch their 'wildered, haggard mien
When singing, whistling, screaming, siren flutes
Tickled their ears ; their horror and dismay
When in their thievish hands the graspèd oars
To coiling serpents grew and bound their arms,
When ivy stems and sprays like knotting cords
Twined round their bodies. Ah me, what a sight !

The masts to snakes had grown, I, turned to lion,
Sat calmly watching the side-splitting fray,
Then oh, I laughed until my sides nigh cracked.
They, knowing not who'd wrought the fearful change,
Nigh dead with terror, frenzied, sprang about,
Now here, now there, t' escape the wonderment,
Till wrought to madness o'er the bark they leaped
Into the surging sea, where, rolling round
Between the soft green waves, I turned them straight
To great plump dolphins, then addressed myself
(Leaving my shipwrecked sailors in the main
Happier as playful fish than thievish knaves)
To these surpassing shores of loveliness.
Nor I alone have made these ravishing glades
My chosen haunt; great Zeus in olden times

Descended to these meadow-girded peaks

And called them by his name, and here his bird

Loves still to circle o'er the granite blocks

And glistening marble boulders, perching oft

Upon the heathered cloud-embraced crags.

Also bright Loxias here whilom abode,

And where he sets his fertilising foot,

Beauty and strength spring up and dwell as one.

There towers Coronis too, whom Loxias loved;

Ah, nymph Coronis, cruel was thy fate!

Once wandering here upon soft olive slopes

And 'neath the shining leaves and golden fruit,

Or staying thy fairy steps to pluck and eat

The crimson pomegranate or the purple fig,

How little did'st thou dream Helios would rise

Upon this blessed isle and warm thee not,

That all thy well-filled veins of living blood

Would stagnate so, not even Loxias' self,

And all his fierce effulgence, could dissolve

The fixèd purple current in the stone

Which now thou art. Nor could thy fancy paint

That here for radiant Loxias' return

Thou'dst raise thy frozen marble to the clouds

O'ershadowing thee in cheerless solitude.

Where Loxias loved, remains now but his shrine

And marble statue scarce to beauty grown,

Silent and cold as thou, to comfort thee.

Oh cruel huntress-queen! oh Artemis,

No mirth, no joy thou knowest save only one,

One joy to hunt the living down to death.

See! where the bounding hart, with timid eyes
And loving, hastes to meet her antlered mate;
Swift speeds a silver arrow flashing straight
Into the palpitating breast, and cold
And stiff the slender gracefulness, unharmful,
Lies motionless, love's soft reproach within
The glazing eyes. Thus each starred eve Coronis,
Eagerly gazing through the purple night,
Waited the God her yearning heart had power
To draw to earth. Artemis, sister-goddess,
Rending the sapphire veil, looked down, and knew
Great Loxias hastening here to greet the nymph.
Coldly she passed behind a curtaining cloud,
Nor long could she endure this sylvan spot,
Her chosen haunt, should desecrated be

By foot of her who not her votaress was.
The startled deer had turned to sniff the air,
He fled, as up she raised and bent her bow;
Her aim was not for him, the shaft sped home
Where Loxias ne'er again should lay his head.
And now the marble mountain towering stands—
The tender nymph transformed to veinèd stone,
A monument raised up of huntress' hate—
Now Artemis no longer here abides
Nor visits us, she shuns our mysteries,
Abhors the decorated shrine and rites;
Slain victims only deck her altars stern,
And crimson tide for pressed pomegranate juice
Brims o'er her sacred vessels. Richly decked
To-day my altars. Ha! who lieth here?

What beauty at my shrine reclining charms
The entrancèd soil? Who is this peerless dame,
Can't be great Artemis, the cruel queen,
In sweetest slumber? Soft, too soft for her!
Where is the sparkling bow? the deadly darts?
The well-filled quiver? no, it is not she,
No, straighter, slenderer is the huntress-maid,
And not so bright in hue nor yet so waved
Her sheltering tresses. Nor doth she resemble
In aught my Mænades, unlike to them
As unto Artemis, statelier, more white
And graver even in slumber than the dames
Who chant my mirthful songs and gladdening rites;
Who may it be? Some priestess, by her mien.
Oh, would I had Apollo's mighty power

Of divination! Is't, perchance, Coronis?

Coronis never dead? or newly changed

To life again by his resistless will?

Does she here wait his coming in sweet dreams?

As Aphroditê's self seems she to me,

Shining so fair through clustering golden locks;

A goddess 'tis, methinks! and yet not so;

Why, I will waken her to speak to me,

Nor let her lie till King Apollo comes

To take, what lying at my shrine, is mine.

CHOROS.

STRO. 1.

Joy-loving God, let her lie!

Arrest thee! awaken her not!

Peace, while close-fringèd her eye,

Is her scant, her ephemeral lot;

Waken, oh, waken her not!

ANTIS. I.

Press not the dew-crispèd grass,

Utter no sigh nor no sound,

Stay e'en the breezes that pass

Ruffling the shadows around

In soft sleep on the flower-bearing ground.

DIONYSOS.

Why stay I lingeringly? why fear to tread

The charmèd soil? why pause afar to gaze

On trancèd eyes, which, opening to my summons,

Would question me, and soon those ruby lips

Would move and yield ungrudgingly the knowledge
I long to have. The air is filled with tones,
Low dulcet sounds replaced with ominous flutterings;
No longer I forbear. But soft—what's this
Lies gleaming in the grass? 'Mongst shining blades
A blade of glittering steel lies heavily,
Mocking their innocence with sharper light;
Some warrior-maiden surely should this be,
Yet seems she fashioned not for warlike deeds;
Here's brave perplexity indeed! Cords, too,
To bind her captives? twisted up of silk,
Unharmful as herself. Yet doth she wield
This sword I not unwarily would brave
The strength of her light arm. So, lady mine,
You use this mighty rope to fetter those

You vanquish in the strife! No need, no need,
I'm holden faster than great coils could bind;
So, delicate traveller, burden not yourself
With terrible sword and flimsy silken threads.
Lo! there your weapons, yet I stand enthralled,
And can nor backwards go, nor yet advance;
I'll not be stayed—ho, maiden! ho! awake!
Ha! now she stirs, I'll stand aside awhile
For half I dread, half long for her awaking.

ARIADNE.

Ere yet my veiled eyes throw back their lids
To let the lustrous light of deeper orbs
Again invade my soul and steep my sense
In all of liquid beauty that for me

This universe contains, O ears, drink in
The sounds that now shall greet thee. I have slept,
And through my visions lurked phantasma grim,
And unmelodious sounds; then towards the morn,
If morn it were, came milder human tones,
And mingled with the dreams of home and Crete;
Far, far from Crete am I! upon this isle
Alone with Theseus; his then was the voice
Recalled my deep sleep-sated senses back;
Deep sleep, but scarcely kind, for in my dreams
Meseemed I wandered by a ravening stream,
A torrent foaming over splintered rocks
And torn up-heavèd masses, then in pools,
Black, bottomless, and silent, eddying round,
And further on in gentle current running,

With clear, still, shadow-bearing margent waters.
There were two swimmers in the urgent stream,
Who struggled with the torrent as it roared
And pressed them sunderingly from side to side;
Yet ever as it lashed and beat them back,
Apart they strove, and still reached hand to hand.
I wondered with great dread and shudderingly
Should the black eddy sweep and suck one in,
Or should they, conquering these assailing waves,
Defy the flood and reach that shining water
Of peace and safety by the flowery bank.
And then the torrent changed to stealthy stream,
And dark, and slipping o'er the brink I sank
Deep, deep, therein, till all the stagnant flood
Gulfed me entire, and sun and moon and stars

And all sweet sounds and sights vanished away,
And nought I knew but that I was alone
In Hades' ghastly realms. Gray silence reigned,
Bleak, colourless space unflecked of any ray
Or beam of light or brightness, no green plant
Nor lowly herb, nor smallest flower, nor weed,
No towering leafy tree, nor great dim wood
To break the dreary void; no rugged peak
Snowflaked, nor sunny, gently sloping vale,
No undulating sweep nor rising mound
O'er all the low, vast level of the plain;
No song, no scent, no movement, not a breath,
For only breathless things inhabit there,
If aught inhabits it which yet I saw not;
No rushing torrent nor no sparkling stream;

Yet water was there level as the plain,

And gray, and dense, and rippleless, and dull,

It flowed not—it but stood on muddy bed;

No banks, no reeds, no rocks, no source, no end.

Then horror-frozen looked I round for life,

For sign, for sound, yet none perceived awhile,

But only stagnant, boundless space and drear,

And still my ears and eyes strained out to catch

Some sight, some sound, how slight so e'er, of life,

Or even of death. I stretched my numbing hands,

Tight wrung, on high and desperate prayer to Zeus

(Libations I had none) that he would send

Relief, no matter what the form.

He heard, nor did he not refuse assent.

My aching ears felt the blank silence stirred,

My wearying eyes perceived a blurring mass,
Thin shades moved by me, moaning inwardly,
But sending forth no sound, as sound we know ;
I would have moved, or cried aloud to them,
But Will benumbed attended not Desire.
Then swelled the silent wailing into sound,
And all the passing of those formless forms
Caused stir and pulse; then rose a faint, light tone
And glad, which drew me on to peaceful waking—
Awaking where I slept. I shudder now
At thought of that grim place, at sterner thought
That this gray dream should prescient omen prove
Of coming ill, of loneliness, or death.

CHOROS.

STRO. 1.

Dead is the calm that has fall'n on the ocean,
Dead is the wind that erst lashed to commotion
The god-bearing, life-giving sea;
Dead is the foam whence (early arisen)
Anadyomene, from her wave prison
First dawned on the Paphian lea.

ANTIS. 1.

Dead is the magic, the fetters are riven,
Broken the spells and the cords which were given
To conquer and bind evermore,
Broken the links in the hour of your wrecking,

Broken and dead as the foam which lies flecking

The sands of the desolate shore.

ARIADNE.

These wailing tones are not the sounds which fell

Upon my wakening ear and drew me up

With brightening summons from the Lethean wave.

Theseus, where art thou? Theseus! Thou'rt not he—

Theseus! Away, I say! or tell me where,

If thou hast seen him, Theseus awaiteth me.

DIONYSOS.

Goddess, or queen, war-loving Amazon,

Or whatsoever name thy loveliness

Is named by, I alone await thee here.

ARIADNE.

Art thou transformèd then? Theseus stood here.

DIONYSOS.

I know him not, nor thee, though many a day
This isle has been my favoured dwelling-place;
Nor has a human foot approached this spot
While thou hast slept, for I have tarried here
Impatiently for thy awaking. Say,
Who art thou, splendid mortal? Art a queen?

ARIADNE.

A monarch's daughter I, and Theseus' bride;
Him wandering in this isle, perchance thou'st seen?

DIONYSOS.

Who he may be thou speakest of I know not,

But this I may impart: nor man, nor God,

Has wandered here, save only I on wait

To catch thy rising rays, Divinity.

ARIADNE.

O Theseus, lead me from this dreadful spot!

DIONYSOS.

Leave calling one who may not answer thee,

Who will not, if he be a God, nor cannot,

Be he a mortal. In this isle I reign

Sole sovereign, all to me are known who dwell

Hereon, save thou, mysterious vision. Whence

Art thou descended? From beside Zeus' throne?

Or art thou risen from the green sea wave,

Like Aphroditë whom thou dost resemble,

Excelling loveliness? Nay, longer now

Thou must not clothe thyself in mystery,

For know, I love thee; wilt thou be my wife?

ARIADNE.

Oh, shamelessness! intruder hence, I say!

DIONYSOS.

Lo, Eris! verily the War-God's sister!

Great Eris! well thy warlike frown becomes thee,

Thy fierce commanding gestures too, and fit

Thou seem'st to wield the mighty sword.

ARIADNE.

I will not stay to hear thee, foolish dreamer.

DIONYSOS.

What scornful flashes lighten from her eyes!

As scornful and as swift as Artemis.

Ha, stay thy steps! I will not let thee pass!

Art thou then, Artemis, that thus in pride

Thy seeming-winged feet flee like the deer

She loves to follow? or whilst fleeing me

Dost thou pursue — what name did'st thou pronounce?

ARIADNE.

No longer question me, but let me go.

DIONYSOS.

Thou shalt not go till thou hast heard my love.

ARIADNE.

Now if thou art a God thou should'st refrain,
And thou should'st know the Athenian is not far,
And that no mortal, no, nor God, could win
The fixèd mind, once ruled by Fate to speed
Down certain ways, to deviate from its path.
Wilt thou now let me pass to seek out Theseus?

DIONYSOS.

Ah, Theseus, say'st thou? let me think a space.

ARIADNE.

Thou'st seen him then? thou knowest where he bides?

DIONYSOS.

This Theseus is perchance the Attic hero?

ARIADNE.

Ay, he! Thou know'st these ways, point out the path
That likeliest will take me where he strays.

DIONYSOS.

He likeliest strays in Attica, my queen;
If thou would'st follow him, full long and sore
Thou'dst find the way; but hither hie thy steps,
And mount this mossy knoll, that I may point
The road that leads to Attica and him.
Now look along the winding glen that skirts
This tangled thicket and the far pine wood,
Down to that stretch of yellow sand that lies
Beyond those rocks; now bear thy sight away
Gently, but straight as 'twere in line with it.

See'st thou not there a tiny fading sail?

Well, that small bark makes straight for Attic coasts,

Now thou may'st think where Attic Theseus bides.

ARIADNE.

'Tis false! avaunt! thou art some evil thing

In likeness of a God, avaunt! avaunt!

DIONYSOS.

Nay, cruel, know 'tis Dionysos speaks.

ARIADNE.

And wert thou Zeus himself, I would not hear.

DIONYSOS.

Be patient, sit thee down and think on it;

If Theseus was but lately on this isle,

Doubtless his bark it is which now flies far,
Scudding before the wind. Why he should fly
I know not, yet if he desires thy love
Why does he sail away? if thee he loves
Say, why not tarry here? why leave thee lone
To bear the brunt of evil fortune? none
To wait on thee and tend thy footsteps, none
To cheer thy day and guard thy couch by night
From fierce approach of savage beast, or foes
Wherewith this lonely island might be peopled.
Be patient now awhile, think it is well
I found thee first, for I am strong to guard,
And have the will to cherish and protect.
I'll wed thee, though I never learn thy name,
And tend and wait on thy unspoken wish;

Know, I can give thee choicest things of earth,

And spread the daintiest couch of odorous flowers

Thou e'er hast lain upon. Say, is this isle

Not sweet? It shall be thine, and thou shalt reign

Therein as Queen, as Goddess. Though I be a God,

I'll cull for thy delight the sweetest flowers,

And wreathe them in thy fragrant sunny hair;

The clearest water from the bubbling spring

That in a nook high on Coronis' shoulder

Wells up and ripples through cool crevices

(I wot well of its fine refreshing power)

Shall lave thy troubled brows and tender palms,

And for thy thirst the big, black, swelling grape

Shall burst upon thy scornful curling lips:

Thou know'st not half the joys I'll give thee, sweet.

ARIADNE.

I know how thou canst torture with thy words,
And yet I'd thank thee would'st thou let me go.

DIONYSOS.

Where would'st thou go? I'll lead thee where thou wilt.

ARIADNE.

Take me to Theseus and I'll worship thee;
Since thou'rt a God, act as beseems a God.

DIONYSOS.

How know I where this Theseus may be found?
But I would take thee, knew I where to go;
Think, if he wishes thee, why comes he not

To find thee? Better thou believe the truth:

He'll ne'er revisit thee, or he'd not fled.

Turn not away, nor hide those dewy eyes;

I will not let thee weep, I'll fetch thee birds,

Sweet nightingales, to charm thee with their music,

And when thou'rt lulled I'll tell thee wondrous tales,

And strange and fanciful (yet true withal),

That soon will draw thy downcast eyelids up

And gladder beams from out thy wondering eyes.

Or I will ask of all the yet unknown

To me within thy past thou may'st desire

To tell, and I will speak of all thou most

Dost love to hear of, or I will lie and listen

When thou hast will to speak; or forth I'll go

And leave thee when thou cravest solitude,

And graceful maidens here shall wait on thee,
Early and late to do thee services;
And when thou'rt weary, by thy couch I'll stay,
If so thou wilt; and when thou art refreshed,
I'll guide thee through these woods and o'er these hills
Where thou may'st gaze on scenes of rich enchantment.
Say, wilt thou try this gentle life with me?

ARIADNE.

Nay, were it gentle as thy gentle words,
Kind stranger, know I ne'er can turn my gaze
From looking down the radiant ways I trod
Erewhile with one who was to me as king,
Hero, and God; if he no more should turn,

How could another rise to that high place,
That chrysolite pinnacle whereon my fancy,
Exalting this rare-seeming mortal, throned him?
For know, if I have erred in this conception,
Where most it doth import that instinct, ay,
And judgment point unerringly, my faith
In mine own self is irredeemably
Shattered to just negation; nor is't fit
That I should answer yea or nay to reason,
Nor any sanction give to any impulse;
Nor could I have the power nor wield the will
To solve or to determine argument;
I must become an outcast from myself,
A priestess scourged away from her own altar,
Driven o'er the threshold of the shrine she tended,

The lamps, the fires gone out; her only sense

(Her prophet power and her aspirings gone)

The sense of crushing ruin borne to her

By the hoarse barring of the temple doors

That close behind her downward lagging steps—

Her fate the fate of all whose reason fails

To guide the footsteps in the hour of need.

And still to enhance the fiery rankling pain

This only sense one fact would ever hold

Clinchèd inseverably: the deity

To whom she'd burned her incense day and night

Had fallen from his lofty pedestal,

And being not of marble but of clay,

And being not sustained with sacred fire,

But moulded of the unadhering dust

Of the cold mortal earth, was, in his fall,

Shattered to fragments on the low cold earth

From whence he native sprang—his kindred clay.

DIONYSOS.

My senses never yet have felt the touch

Of such benumbing sounds; the clammy dews

Of her despair fall cold upon my brow,

And chill my tongue; so I know neither thoughts

Nor words wherewith to comfort her, nor yet

To urge her will to cast some kinder glance

Upon her fate and me. She turns away

Wearily patient; I will leave awhile.

Lady and queen, think not so bitterly

Of what betides thee in this sorry hour;

Rest thee awhile, and I will fetch refreshment,

Some fine gold comb of honey from the hive,

And new-drawn milk, and cakes of kneaded meal

All wreathèd round with odorous eglantine,

Lilies and violets, and the sweetest blooms;

These will delight thine eyes and every sense.

Also I'll fetch the snowiest, thickest fleece

Of all the soft white flock for thy content

When thou shalt stretch thy languid limbs to rest;

And swifter shall my eager feet in this

Thy service fly, hence swifter, swifter hither,

Than silver-sandelled Artemis when she

Ungirds her frozen peplus for the joy

And warmth she hath in harrying down the fleet,

Shaft-fearing deer through tangled bracken glades.

CHOROS.

Stro. I.

Ay! swiftly the Godhead may pass, and swiftly may
hitherwards hie,
Swiftly, but oh, not so swift as shafts winged with
mortality fly,
And oh, not so swift as the keenly-clasped joys which
in upspringing die.

Antis. I.

Rolls back swift on the steep-terraced shingle the tide
stream, the white wave fades down,
Fade swiftly fair roses, and swiftly the fragrant, the
flower-wreathèd crown,

[illegible] as the broom withering 'neath the

[illegible]

[illegible]

Nor the song of the lark, nor the flight of the swallow,

Nor the resemblance it wears after to the morrow,

None of these fly so swiftly

None of all pass so fleetly

As the gold the Horæ strew on the thread round the spindle.

Or the glow on the woof where the gray sisters mingle

The glory, the grimness of life,

The passionate joy, the fierce strife;

Or the rainbow-hued froth sparkling up as we grip

The chalice of life while its fragrance we sip,

Sinking swiftly away from the touch of the lip.

ARIADNE.

In vain! in vain! where ever-springing fount

Of inexhaustible, bright hope purled up,

Now stagnant gloom doth bear me heavily down;

Darkness and chilling dews benumb my limbs,

And black despair doth grimly clutch my soul.

And yet if hope is dead, what pricks me on

To clamour forth his name in wild appeal?

Theseus! again in sickening fear I call,

Again I shrill thy name athwart the night;

Theseus, return! if thou art hidden here,

Or errest in some tangled thicket maze,

Why heralds not thy voice the pathless track,

Or horrid grove which doth encompass thee?

Have I not in the afflicting, terrible night

Of sore perplexity and complex doubt,

Woven the certain threads which led thy steps

Back from the horrid centre of the maze,

Back from the den through all the murky windings,

And shall my entreaties fail to bring thee now?

Have I not, fame-regardless, for thy sake,

Embarked upon the sund'ring billowy deep?

For thy sake have I not renounced my home,

My ties of kindred, royal father's love,

A mother's tenderness, and pastimes sweet

With clinging, youthful sister? my renown,

Have I not stripped it off and blown it from me

E'en as the feathery down of meadow flowers,

And left me bare as they when thus despoiled?

And shall I fear to seek thee through the thorns

Of densest forest, e'en though howling beasts

And ravenous pursue with fiercest feet?

O listening leaves, O lullèd winds, O grots

And tender groves, O dense black shades, and caves

And broken chasms, where does Theseus stray?

O whispering glooms, and strange mysterious ways,

Now desolate of golden beams which late

Were lavish here, why darkly fold ye up

His longed-for glory from my tear-dimmed sight?

Theseus! thou art the Olympian prize I crave;

Theseus! thou art the sun, Helios, to me;

Theseus! thou art the air I stifle for,

The wave where only I renew my strength,

The cup which only holds wine for my lips,

The vessel which alone contains my food;

Theseus! thou art the fount whence springs my life,

Thy arms the only couch my limbs can know,

Thy breast the only pillow for my head;

Theseus! thou art the fire that warms my veins,

Thy pulse the only pulse that beats in me,

Thy breath the only breath that I can draw,

Thy thought the only thought that throbs in me;

Thou art not near, I fail, I fade, I cease!

Persephone, receive the sinking shade!

The last pale star of night shoots to eclipse,

Sky, sea, and earth to ashen chaos fuse—

(*Artemis passes in the distance.*)

Not yet! a glimmer in the Hesperian sky,

'Tis huntress Artemis wandering through the night,

A pale, cold gleam behind the wrackful cloud

Pointing, with pitiless steely shafts, the edge

Of piled-up masses of gray desolation;

Alas! bright Artemis, thou'rt heavenly fair,

But cruel cold! I shiver in thy beams!

And thou the only Godhead looking down

Shinest unmoved at rending of my heart,

And glid'st away unheedful of my woes,

Hiding thy silvery self within the veil

Which curtains off the dear heavens from my sight.

But ah! thy last chill ray is pitiless kind,

Cruelly glints it sharp across his sword,

Confounding thy pale radiance with the blue,
Cold, shimmering reflex of his deadly steel,
Sundering, with seeming innocence, my heart
At sight of all I have of him; discovering too
The weapon which shall smite my pain to death.
Come! I will kiss thee, cruel gleaming blade,
Will clasp thee into kindness, cruel sword,
Within the smiting of the crueller ray
Which lights thee to the riven heart of me.
Yet art thou chill and awful in mine arms,
I shudder from thy sharpened edge and point;
Thou dost not woo me with a gentle touch,
But stay'st inflexible and hard as he
Whom I invoke in vain, vainly as thee!
He will not hear my cry; silent as thou,

He answereth not the wail of my despair.

I have no kinder lover left than thou,

For thou, not wooing, yet wilt flee me not,

Wilt not resist my desperate fettering arms,

Have they but firmness to caress thee close,

But they're not strong to hold or him or thee.

Wilt thou be kinder, coil? wilt thou not lace

My shrinking throat about, and hold it tight?

His sword is part of him, and doth partake

By long acquaintance with his pitiless touch,

His cold unpitying nature. 'Tis not so;

Some unforeseen affairs detain him hence;

But e'en as thou sink'st down, O heavy sword,

So sinks my heavier heart o'ercharged with weight

Of dreadful prescience that he'll ne'er return.

O sword, while thus I slander, and O coil,
While feigning thee to coax to my desire,
Within my rending heart I truly know
I shrink from self-assault and violence
Unto my life, and when I most need nerve
To give the one fierce blow which shall arrest
The current of my being, fails my strength—
Ay, fails my courage for the savage stroke;
I pause dismayed, the vast abyss I see,
The limitless, the horrent nebulous void.
I see the King, a huge black formless shade,
Aidoneus, seated on his pallèd throne,
And sad Persephone, the shrouded Queen,
Ivy and nightshade purpling her dark brows;
And further in the chaos yet unpierced

A frowning shapelessness, immense, unclear,

But faintly like my wrathful father, Minos.

Doth he precede me there? No, I go first,

But shudder at the horror of the going,

And shudder at the horror of the state,

The infinite, gray, everlasting void,

The blank stagnation, chilly, desolate waste,

The terror, floating through the murky air,

Of crime and anguish and of damning wrath

Flashing as flames from eyes of dooming judges

Passing fierce sentence on remorseful shades.

Ah, now the beauteous forms of those I loved

In Crete rise up and float before my swimming eyes,

Beauteous but sad, distraught, angry withal.

O Minos, father! mother, Pasiphaë!

Avert not thus your glances from your child !

Phædra, sweet sister, stay and look at me !

Flee not away, or take me with you then ;

Take me, oh ! take me to my once-loved home,

The many-chambered mansions of my father ;

Leave me not here to sink down hopeless gulfs

Of black despair, fleeing before my thoughts—

Before my thoughts pursuing as fierce fiends,

Piercing and stabbing me to thousand deaths.

Oh ! stay—let me take breath. My heart, be strong

Nor faint before these phantoms self-evolved.

They are not here ; we ne'er shall meet again.

I am alone in Naxos. Let me think !

So, calmly now I view the dreary whole.

Why linger I in life ? what charm have years,

Years that but dull the edges of the soul

And blunt the finer lustres of its temper?

Would I live on an unwinged, smiling life,

And reach my hand to him across the seas

And send him tamely message of forgiveness,

Or joy that he finds joy in other arms?

Oh, whip me the poor slaves that thus can speak!

And why live on to earn the honour of age?

What honour in life is there could charm me now?

And what hath age of beauty that fine youth

Hath not also? All calm and steadfast ways,

Clear-tempered patience, and the kindly calm

Age prides itself to have (not always hath)

Hath lofty youth when youth is high indeed,

Adding youth's fire, (which age goes halting for)

Possessing still its flame in strenuous grasp
Of powerful eagerness and trembling strength.
I've looked down those descending darkling paths
'Mongst Minos' counselling senators from a child
E'en until now, and know no jot therein
Of subtle beauty that fine youth has not.
What boots existence when the chosen good
Doth cease to own affinity with us
Who chose it? Nought. Then, let us make an end.
Come, curling coils, be kind unto my neck;
Weave round about it with a close embrace,
Nor leave thy loving pressure till my last
Expiring sigh has breathed itself away
Over the billowy sea to my lost joy.

What, knotted up so close? tangled so stiff?

E'en as he wove thee round his conquering hands

When swiftly threading back the mazy ways,

E'en as I wound and crushed thee from his arms.

O steadfast cords! be frail unto my prayer

And steadfast ever after! loosen now

These ties as he has loosened his, but swift

Repent, and turning back reknit yourselves

In lasting bonds about my captive neck.

I struggle with you now, but only now;

Lace but my throat about, and I will yield

Me gently, lovingly, to your embrace.

The dusky, jagged clouds set sail again,

And Artemis doth light me unto death.

MONOCHOROS.

Stay, passing clouds! stay, oh stay!

Sweep your long-fringèd, dark skirts

O'er the clear sapphire floor of the sky;

Unveil not night's unpitying Queen,

Weave o'er her merciless whiteness,

Over her death-lighting brightness,

Over her coldness your raiment;

Weave up your measureless gray,

Your rain-threads knit up into robes

Of silvery enveloping showers.

We're athirst, we're athirst for your moisture!

Bear, bear not your waters away!

Our eyelids, our eyes are too weary,

Too weary of watching the hours;

We are parched, we are withered, we languish!

Let the woof of your soft draping curtain

Be heavy, and close, and thick woven,

Screen Artemis darkly from sight,

And bathe us in rain-deepening night.

ARTEMIS.

The last of all the swift, soft-footed beasts,

Meseems, has fled o'er uncrushed blooms beyond

The winging of my untired shafts, and sought,

In unlit glades, safety from following death,

And sweet repose in heather-scented clefts.

Woods, blooms, and beasts, wearied alike with strife

Of blustering day and hurrying winds, are hushed

And silent, hid from searching ken, save where
The silvery reflex of my bow reveals
Their unstirred sleep. I only wander here,
Gliding o'er snowy heights and purple hills,
And through the spaced entwinement of the boughs
Glancing o'er violet-beds and glades of fern
Down to the fair moss-margent of the pool
Wherein I look and linger unmolest
Through the sweet summer night-tide to the dawn.
The earth in these pale hours is fair to see,
Undesecrate by laughter and wild mirth,
Haloed with tremulous lustre of the stars,
And folded round in purple robe of night.
Divest of ruffling passion 'tis a place
Fit for heaven's deities to wander in.

Apollo, Brother-God ! if at high'st noon

I gazed upon thy scarce created image

Glowing within an amber sea of light,

With wondering, awe-toned love, how, at this hour,

Should I admiring yearn towards the gray stone

Athwart the mellowing light, where thou, but half

Enshrined and dimly, lookest forth ? But hark !

A sound ? Surely not yet doth Eos leave

Her couch, and robe her to ascend heaven's heights !

And yet a trembling—no, the east is wan

And pallid still, and Oceanus yet

Untinged by the first shimmer of her eyes.

A stifled moan, a sigh ! ah, I will haste,

For here, I do remember me, doth stand

The Dionysian altar, here perchance

Lingers some orgie-worn, exhausted Mænad,
Sunk down in feverish sleep from recent revel;
Nay, turn and seek—perhaps a wounded deer
Yet stirring in the stiffening cramp of death;
Out then, my keenest shaft, and end her woe,
Speed swift and straight! Where art thou, wounded one?
Ah yes, the heather shivers, through the fern
A staggering step—bow, be not bent in vain,
But through the gloom dismiss unerringly
My willing arrow winged with pitying death.

MONOCHOROS.

Veilless, unshadowed, unquivering,
Flawless, the radiance revealing

The deed that is done in the night;

Gleaming as dart from her quiver,

Flashing as flashes the river

She hastens to flood with her light.

Like lightning, undevious, unerring,

(Nor hare, nor antlered prey stirring)

As the toil-worn to waters they crave;

Silvery as plumèd shaft gliding

Deep down the stream of life, guiding

A mortal to death's shadowy wave.

ARIADNE.

O life! my life! what chanceth to thee now?

How keen and sore and sudden is this smart!

Yet not so sore, Athenian, as the wound

Wherewith thou'st wounded my too-eager life!

Now, kind sharp barb, I thank thee for thy pains,

Kinder than coil and sword art thou to me,

For these but won me bright, swift-passing bliss,

And following gnawing pain insatiate;

But thou immeasurably long surcease

Of grievous anguish, speeding me away

To grave oblivion in the stagnant stream.

MONOCHOROS.

Sped! sped! sped!

The light, the loveliness dead!

The gleam the fair Godhead shed,

The beams, the bright rays, with her fled;

Dead! dead! dead!

Ye clouds ! O ye clouds thickly woven !

Your shuttle was tardy and fickle,

Your late-falling tears slowly trickle

O'er the heart lying cruelly cloven.

The keen life, the fierce joy, the desire,

Ashened, and darkened, and drenched,

Her fire in your waters lies quenched,

Broken the strings of life's lyre.

Yet, as e'en from your thick-threaded rain

Mixed with flowers, will rank poison plants spring,

So her clouding o'er Theseus will fling,

'Mongst his joys a full, rank-rooted pain.

Wail ! wail ! wail !

The triumphs, the joys that have been !

The son of the Amazon queen,

Chaste Artemis' votary, I ween,

Will be chosen the victim and flail.

DIONYSOS.

Lit by the veiled beams of the pallid moon,

(Capricious, grudging e'en her meagre light)

I've penetrated to the leafy layers

Of luscious berries, and have seized the soft

Pink, juicy fruit; also to drowsy hives

Where lies close hidden in most secret cells

The sweetest honey cased in amber wax,

And borne away the richest, crispest comb;

From their leaf-shaded, dew-drenched beds I've plucked

Down-drooping delicate lilies for her smiles;

And, ere the lark 'gan dream of his first song,

I urged the dairy maidens to the stalls
To brim their blanchèd pails with frothing milk,
And pile their brown meal cakes. And here the crown
Of precious gold, set with seven starry gems,
T'adorn the pearly brow and radiant head
Of my bright lady and Queen. Where is the nymph
I late left clouded in her radiant tears?
Here is her couch of soft scarce-ruffled moss
Whence she sprang forth disdainful, in a storm,
A whirlwind, of bewildered doubts and sighs,
Of billowy hopes and fears, and tangled cries
Of wild entreaty and fierce indignation.
Useless, when ocean torn with passionate winds,
Lashed by conflicting hurricanes, assails
The firmament, and foaming from its heights

Descends to the black nethermost abyss,

To launch the pleasing skiff, to grasp the smooth,

Well-fashioned oars which fittingly caress

Fair Aphroditè's gentle cradling wavelets.

The tempest now is lulled, no sound, no sigh;

Has she perchance found her deserting friend,

And fled with him across the favouring sea?

Or has she wandered through the mazy wood

In search of her base scorner? Ah, the thorns

Of such pursuit, methinks, should soon lame feet

And heart alike! Perchance she's lying prone

In smarting restlessness, or wearied quite

Has fallen again to sleep's deluding arms.

I'll seek her through the isle; I know each nook

Where fairy foot—— What glistening, steely beam

Afflicts the flowerets and my scanning eye?

Her sword,—and ah! upon the grassy blades

What lustre? Shining ivory transpierced

With silver shaft? Surely not dead, my Queen?

Arise! arise! speak, cry and shrill aloud,

Rail on me, sweet, as erst, and flaunt me forth

E'en as thou wilt, but only rise and speak.

Live, beauteous stranger, live! a God entreats;

If I offend thy sight I will away.

Oh, let me succour thee! say who it was

Who, cruel, wounded thee! I will withdraw

The wicked shaft and suck the poison forth;

Ah, hideous stream purpling the pallid side!

O fixèd eyes, flash once again and blast

Me with thy scorn! Cruel e'en now

In cruel death as in thy cruel life,
When fate was keen and emulant with thee
In cruelty. Now thou'rt outdone, and fate
Is victrix here. Eager I clasp the cold
Unyielding form, and shiver from the stiff
Repelling chill which yet not kills, nor stays,
Nor tempers aught the fever of my love.
When thou wast quick thy ardent-breathing soul
Lit up this flame, consumed, but did not still;
Now thou art changed, hast armed thyself anew,
And with thy frigid eyes doth pierce my heart.
Be gentle, oh relax thine icy stiffness,
And yield thee to the life-restoring kiss
Of a great God. In vain! in vain! Grim Orcus
Enamourèd hath waited here and me

Forestalled; within his hated arms he holds
Her with unsevering clasp, and she descends
Mute, passive, unresisting to the shades.
But shall Death have her all, while I, a God,
Remain to rescue part? No, by Zeus' throne!
Not wholly can this grimmest groom of death
Ravish to realms of unimpassioned night
The living mystery which charmed and chained
A God to rapturous gaze, to feel content
That on the earth he loves, a beauteous breath
Incarnate from above did waft across
These lower levels, raising struggling growths
And perishable blooms through higher airs
Towards ever-longed-for unattained heights.
Thus, then, infernal King, abate your prize,

And yield to me the imperishable fire
Which lit these ways ere thy dark foot did freeze
The glory which has faded down with her.
I snatch the heaven-lit flame from thy dark palm,
And bear it, far from thy fire-quenching grasp,
Upwards, above these ever-changing scenes
Through azure waves to high empyrean dome,
And there within a sapphire vaulted palace
I will enthrone and crown with living stars
The light that shone (while she was animate
And tarried in this grosser tenement)
Athwart the bright revealing body of her.
Here is the crown I would have crowned her with,
Here are the starry gems for her fair brow;
My Queen, be crowned! thy name shall never pass,

I will extol, exalt, and bear thee hence,

I'll bear thy starry light away to heaven,

Will bear it up among the spheres, and place it

On unassailable pinnacle of heaven

To glad the skies and all this lower world.

Thus shall the pure, undeathly flame be raised

To lasting state of luminosity,

And there in starry splendour shall she shine

For ever in the brilliant court above.

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